Media Writing - Spring 2019 Course Syllabus

Instructor Name: Dr. Matt Tedrow  
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Course Number: MEDA-2311.001  
Classroom: CCH 209 meets MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.  
Office Hours: MW 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.; W 4:50 p.m. - 6:50 p.m. and by appointment

Course Information and Description
This course is designed to teach the fundamentals of writing for the mass media. It includes instruction in professional methods and techniques for gathering, processing, and delivering content. Throughout the course, students are expected to:

- cover ethics, truth, and honesty in journalism;
- produce well-reported and well-written, stylistically acceptable news stories, with an emphasis on verification and accuracy;
- conduct interviews that elicit information and quotes for use in news and feature stories;
- find and evaluate appropriate and diverse news sources and build the research necessary for strong stories;
- learn to write a short feature story, using appropriate description, detail, and quotes.
- develop strong interview and reporting skills;
- understand and be able to apply AP Style to news stories;
- meet deadlines;
- create and update digital portfolios to reflect ongoing work

Student Learning Outcomes
1. Demonstrate proficiency in using writing and newsgathering skills in order to locate, evaluate, and present information to media audiences.
2. Demonstrate proficiency in identifying and utilizing various types of media platforms.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in written communication appropriate for mass audiences.

Supplies Needed
- Flash Drive/SD Card
- Digital Recorder/Smartphone
- Reporter’s Notebook
Required and Recommended Readings

● **Textbook**
  2018 Associated Press Stylebook (spiral-bound recommended; you should always have this book with you). Students may also consider subscribing to the AP Stylebook online.

● **Recommended or Supplemental Reading**
  - The local daily newspaper – Corpus Christi Caller-Times
  - The campus newspaper – Island Waves
  - Major national news media - CNN, the New York Times, the Washington Post, etc.

● Additional supplemental readings may be assigned by the instructor throughout the semester.

Course Assignments and Grading

The core components of this course are the writing assignments, complemented by in-class quizzes and a final online portfolio. Story assignments will be completed outside of class, under deadline pressure. Additional assignments may be added as needed. Class attendance is required. Laptops will be permitted in class for note taking and reference. If a student abuses a laptop for non-class purposes, that student’s laptop privileges will be rescinded for the duration of the semester.

Dates for assignment deadlines and in-class quizzes will be posted on the course website as the semester unfolds. Because good journalism often involves responding to real-world events, dates may change at the instructor’s discretion.

The grading scale will be based on these percentages:

A: 90-100
B: 80-89
C: 70-79
D: 60-69
F: below 60

Your stories will count for 60 percent of your grade, with increasing weight as the semester progresses, as follows:

● Stories 1-3, cumulative – 15 percent
● Stories 4-6, cumulative – 45 percent
● All stories must have a multimedia component - 3-5 photos, video, infographic, etc.
In addition to interviewing, reporting, writing, and editing copy, the journalistic process includes participation in budget meetings so that students can propose and give feedback on story ideas. Students who do not participate in budget meetings will have points deducted from story grades.

The remaining 40 percent of a student’s final course average comes from the following:

- 5 quizzes on current events and course content, cumulative – 15 percent
- 10 AP quizzes, cumulative – 15 percent
- Attendance – 5 percent
- Final portfolio – 5 percent

**Copy Output**

The story assignments are considered a minimum requirement for passing the course. Each story should be at least 500 words long (typed, double-spaced, 1.25-inch margins, 12-point font size). If your story is shorter, it’s usually because either you didn’t ask enough questions, didn’t have enough sources, had a topic of limited news value or significance, or any combination thereof. Limit word count to 800 unless otherwise instructed. All stories must have a multimedia component: photo, audio interview, SoundSlides, video, infographics. - or any combination. Finally, each story must be accompanied with a cover sheet detailing the following:

- The “budget line” or topical description of the story.
- A list of source names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses
- A list of websites (or other “invisible” sources) used
- Three ideas for follow-up stories that relate to the assignment

Assignments should be turned in at the end of lecture on the due date.

**Story Assignments**

- **Story 1 – Speeches, events.** Attend a news conference, meeting or lecture on campus or in the community and report on it. Story should include contact with source(s) prior to the event, context, and reactions from those in attendance.
- **Story 2 - Crime/public safety.** Story must feature some angle about a crime or public safety issue on campus or within the community.
- **Story 3 – Education.** The story peg should focus on a specific education issue, crisis or problem; the angle must be local (specifically, any area school district, college or university). You must obtain at least three human, non-biased, informed sources for this story – parent, student, teacher/professor, administrator, expert/consultant - and all sources must be relevant to the topic.
● **Story 4 – Local government.** Local government stories can cover government issues in this region or your home community, including: city council, county commissioners, or any taxing entity. Story can also focus on a sub-unit of government, such as the planning and zoning commission, parks and recreation department, etc. Students should attend a posted meeting to gain experience from reviewing an agenda, sitting through the meeting, talking to officials, speakers and sources affected by the agenda. Story should focus on one agenda item that would be considered ongoing “issue coverage” as discussed in class. Rough draft due week of Oct. 29 for in-lab peer critique.

● **Story 5 – Short feature.** Story may involve an event or sports (not game coverage) or be a profile about a person. You'll include scene setting and other pertinent description enhancing the humanity in your storytelling. You must use at least three human sources for this story and observe the detail yourself.

● **Story 6 – News through the numbers.** This story should cover a business or government issue that involves numbers. It should interpret and explain a statistical or mathematical concept for readers in a clear and engaging way. The story should provide some contextualization to help the reader understand how to interpret the numbers being presented. The business issue needs to be explained in terms of the “big picture” and in terms of the “close-up” – that is, with at least humanizing, on the-ground example of a person affected by the issue. Note: this is not a business profile piece, so it should not merely be a story that includes one company’s sales figures or market share.

**Online Portfolio**

All edited story assignments should be posted to an online portfolio. Submit the URL of your final portfolio to your instructor no later than the last class day.

**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. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

**Dropping a Class**

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 your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course.
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.

**Late Work and Missed Assignments**

Deadlines: In mass communication, and especially in journalism, deadlines are crucial. If an individual continually misses deadlines in a real-world work environment, that person risks losing his/her job. Treat this class as if it were a job. Stories are always due on the deadline specified. If a student sees there might be a problem meeting a deadline, let the instructor know early so a new plan can be drafted. Otherwise, there will be no exceptions for missing a deadline.

**Attendance/Tardiness**

Attendance in this class is mandatory. You are expected to be present for every class unless otherwise instructed. This is especially important given that much of the course involves regular discussion with peers about news leads, sources, reporting issues, etc. If you have a legitimate reason for not attending (illness, disaster, death), contact the instructor beforehand (by e-mail) and present a note from a physician or other official documentation at the next class. This is your responsibility; the professor will not remind you. At the end of the semester, if the instructor does not have supporting evidence of your excused absence it will be marked as unexcused and will affect your grade. If you have a religious holiday, please let the instructor know beforehand. The instructor is not responsible for repeating material covered in class. If you are late or absent, it is your responsibility to check with another student in the class to find out what you missed.

Excessive absences will affect your course grade. No more than TWO absences are allowed in this class. Each additional absence will result in deductions from your final course grade.

**Grade Appeals**

As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, Student Grade Appeals. These documents are accessible online at:
For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office in the college in which the course is taught. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal in CLA, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, [http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html](http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html).

**Statement of Civility**

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi has a diverse student population that represents the population of the state. Our goal is to provide you with a high quality educational experience that is free from repression. You are responsible for following the rules of the University, city, state and federal government. We expect that you will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

**Academic Honesty/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 examinations or examination materials, falsification, forgery, complicity or plagiarism. In an instructional setting, plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source. Plagiarism is a violation of academic expectations, but it is sometimes difficult to understand what plagiarism actually is. Often, students commit unintentional plagiarism (not citing sources properly, for example), because they are unaware of the standards that apply.

In this class, academic misconduct or complicity in an act of academic misconduct on an assignment or test will result in a zero for that assignment that cannot be retaken or resubmitted. In this class, students must identify or attribute every source used in stories. Students must NEVER fabricate quotations, facts, sources or any other information in their stories, nor may they misrepresent any sources or information. Plagiarism and fabrication are major offenses in journalism and other writing professions. Students who plagiarize or fabricate sources for an assignment will receive a ZERO on the assignment.

All work in this class must be original. Students may not use assignments turned in for other classes previously or that are being submitted for another current class without permission from the instructor. The instructor reserves the right to give a failing grade for committing any of these offenses and to refer any academic dishonesty or misconduct to the University.
**Disabilities Accommodations**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

**Statement of Academic Continuity**

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.
Class Calendar

Week 1 - Jan. 14 & 16 - Course Overview & Thinking Like a Reporter

- Jan. 14
  - Course overview
  - Submitting assignments
  - Thinking like a reporter
  - A (very brief) history of journalism in the United States
  - Homework: Begin looking for a speech or event to cover on campus.

- Jan. 16
  - Differences between news stories, feature stories, and opinion/commentary.
  - What makes something newsworthy?
  - Localizing coverage
  - Finding stories - having a nose for news
  - Human and nonhuman sources
  - Navigating access

Week 2 - Jan. 23 - Writing Leads & Nut Graffs; Story Structure

- Jan. 21 - MLK Day; no class
- Jan. 23
  - Current Events Quiz #1
  - Inverted Pyramid and how stories are organized
  - Writing leads & nut graffs

Week 3 - Jan. 28 & 30 - Interviewing & AP Style

- Jan. 28
  - Interviewing - good, bad, ugly
  - Using recorders
  - Note taking
  - Basics of AP Style

- Jan. 30
  - AP Quiz #1
  - Budget meeting to discuss Story #1 - attendance mandatory

Week 4 - Feb. 4 & 6 - Multimedia Components & News Ecologies

- Feb. 4
  - Current Events Quiz #2
  - Using photos, infographics, and other media to tell the story
- News ecologies - where do stories originate?
- How different kinds of news media shape stories

- Feb. 6
  - Story #1 due
  - In-class lab for Story #1

Week 5 - Feb. 11 & 13 - Crime & Public Safety

- Feb. 11
  - AP Quiz #2
  - Public safety stories - cops, EMTs, etc.
  - Why do we cover these stories?
  - Coverage without sensationalism
  - Navigating these sources

- Feb. 12
  - Current Events Quiz #2
  - Budget meeting to discuss Story #2 - attendance mandatory
  - Public safety stories continued

Week 6 - Feb. 18 & 20 - Public Agencies & Freedom of Information

- Feb. 18
  - AP Quiz #3
  - Covering City Council meetings
  - Covering speeches, press conferences
  - Public Access and government transparency
  - Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests

- Feb. 20
  - Story #2 due
  - In-class lab for Story #2

Week 7 - Feb. 27 - Verification, Credibility, and Journalistic Objectivity

- Feb. 25
  - Current Events Quiz #3
  - Budget meeting to discuss Story #3 - attendance mandatory

- Feb. 27
  - AP Quiz #4
  - Source verification
  - Credible sources
  - Journalistic credibility
  - Objectivity - is it okay to take a side?
Week 8 - March 4 & 6 - Broadcast, Radio, and other Media

- March 4
  - AP Quiz #5
  - Reporting for Radio
  - Reporting for TV
  - Podcasts
  - Budget meeting to discuss Story #4 - attendance mandatory

- March 6
  - Story #3 due
  - In-class lab for Story #3

March 11-15 - Spring Break

Week 9 - March 18 & 20 - Mining Digital Data & Ethical Issues

- March 18
  - AP Quiz #6
  - Online government data
  - NGOs and non-profit data
  - Begin work on Online Portfolios

- March 20
  - Current Events Quiz #4
  - Ethical issues in journalism
  - Famous cases

Week 10 - March 25 & 27 - Alternative Media and Covering Diverse Communities

- March 25
  - AP Quiz #7
  - A (very brief) history of alternative media in the United States
  - Are alternative media necessary?
  - Comparing coverage of diverse communities in mainstream vs alternative media

- March 27
  - Story #4 Due
  - In-class lab for Story #4

Week 11 - April 1 & 3 - Reporting with Numbers; Business Coverage

- April 1
  - AP Quiz #8
  - Journalists and Math
○ Translating numbers for audiences
○ Talking to researchers, scientists, marketers, industry specialists

● April 3
○ Current Events Quiz #5
○ Covering publicly traded vs. privately traded companies
○ NGOs and non-profits
○ Government and Business
○ Online resources

** Friday, April 5 - last day to drop a class **

Week 12 - April 10 - Feature Stories, Sports, and Entertainment

● April 8
○ AP Quiz #9
○ Budget meeting to discuss Story #5 - attendance mandatory

● April 10
○ Sports
○ Food, Music, Lifestyle coverage

Week 13 - April 15 & 17 - Journalism Today

● April 15
○ Budget meeting to discuss Story #6 - attendance mandatory
○ Journalism as a career option
○ Salaries
○ Resumes and portfolios

● April 17
○ Story #5 due
○ In-class lab for Story #5

Week 14 - April 24 - Post-Mortem and Work Week

● April 22
○ AP Quiz #10
○ Course post-mortem

● April 24
○ In-class lab for Story #6 and Final Portfolios
Week 15 - April 29 & May 1 - Course Conclusion

- **April 29**
  - In-class lab for Story #6 and Final Portfolios

- **May 1**
  - **Story #6 due**
  - Course Wrap-Up

- **Final portfolios due during finals week**