2016 FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR: CIVIC JOURNALISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

WSTN 305          Instructor: Tom Mullen
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How did the United States learn about the struggle for civil rights? Did the racists who beat ministers, sent dogs to bite children, and turned fire hoses on old people send out a press release? Did the Klan offer a YouTube of its cross-burnings?

Who documents the plight of the hungry and homeless? What hungry people? I don’t see hungry people. The homeless? Where they? Those guys who stand by the Village Shopping Center on Three Chopt? Aren’t they all just addicts?

Where do we go to find out about crime? Or about foods and chemicals that harm us? How about health and education, and the environment? Or what the government is doing in our name? Somebody, somewhere knows stuff and then will Facebook us, right? Or Tweet us? Instagram, maybe?

So how do we find out?
Journalism gives us the information that we need to make decisions to help the common good. We’re talking about real, substantial journalism and not the tabloid trash that is obsessed with the latest celebrity meltdown.

Here’s the bottom line – journalism matters.
This course will explore the ways that journalism has functioned as an instrument of social justice through the identification and publication of issues that include poverty, racism, health, religion, education, and other related topics. We will study case histories in which journalists have brought public attention to important social concerns and the ways in which those concerns were resolved to bring about more just communities. We will identify contemporary issues of concern and undertake research through which we can apply basic journalism training to address specific social situations.
REQUIRED TEXTS

The Elements of Journalism, Kovach and Rosenstiel (latest edition)

A Force for Good: How the American News Media Have Propelled Positive Change, Streitmatter

Muckraking: Journalism that changed America, Serrin

Just Mercy, Stevenson (this is also the UR One Book selection)

Newspaper archives, the University of Richmond

ESSENTIAL LINKS

www.newyorktimes.com
http://www.socialjusticejournalism.org
http://www.justicejournalism.org/index.html
http://hillmanfoundation.org/thesidney
https://www.pulitzer.org
http://www.ajr.org/
http://www.cjr.org/

NEWS READING

You will need to subscribe to the digital edition of The New York Times (get the student discount) and I'll show you how to sign up for the daily email headline service. For the Times, you must read the first six paragraphs of major stories under the headline service subheading.

I will go over details in class about this daily reading. And I do mean daily reading; if you skip a day, it could be that day from which I draw almost all the questions for the weekly current events quiz. Wouldn’t that be a shame? Always be prepared to discuss news and current events.
ATTENDANCE

Come to class on time every day. You may be surprised to find out how much you can learn when you come to class.

Let me know in advance if you have to miss a class for a non-emergency. You are responsible for finding out whatever assignments or material were covered in class. Missing class doesn't mean you can miss a deadline, unless you're dealing with an emergency such as a serious illness or family crisis. Please keep me informed of such events.

If you miss a class, we will miss you. If you miss two classes, I will call you. If you miss three classes, I may have the entire class march over to your dorm and we will hold our session there.

Here is an incentive: if you miss no classes, I will drop your three lowest quiz grades. If you miss just one, I will drop two. If you miss more than three classes, I will bring you into my office to discuss whether I will drop you. If you have five unexcused absences, you will fail the course.

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Our class will explore some community-based learning projects that will put some of your introductory journalism training to use. We are developing opportunities with local groups to provide coverage of some of their activities and events.

OFFICE HOURS, ETC.

I am on campus every day during the week, but it’s best to send an email a day ahead of time to set up a meeting. I am available by email, phone and in person during most reasonable hours and some unreasonable hours. I generally respond quickly to emails, but if I don’t respond to yours right away, it’s personal and I just don’t like you. Or I am awash with other emails from other students and I’ll respond as soon as I can. Pick whichever explanation is best for your self-esteem and believe that it is true.

Please communicate – if you are not clear about something or are concerned about something, get in touch with me right away. If you are shy and don’t want to ask questions in front of others, send me an email.
ASSIGNMENTS

This is a communications-intensive course. We are studying some fundamentals of journalism, too, and you can expect to do a fair amount of writing and rewriting in academic style and news style.

Your assignments include:

   a) A “TED” style team talk of no more than 10 minutes on a particular subject
   b) A five-minute solo oral presentation related to class research
   c) Two news-style papers on a contemporary issue (five-page max)
   d) A substantial final paper (length TBD) on a topic of your choice based on any of the material covered this year
   e) Deadline, short news assignments (one-page max)

I will work with you on your projects at every step. On most assignments, I can coach you by e-mail before your work is due. Ask for assistance and you will receive it. Don't wait until the last minute.

We will have a weekly quiz on current news events. There is no way to make these up. We will have two tests on the readings and other material discussed in class.

You will be responsible for part of one lecture on assigned reading material during the semester. Which means you will get up in front of class and talk while I sit in your seat, text my friends, drink coffee and update Twitter.

The grade breakdown is:
50 percent assignments
20 percent tests
15 percent weekly quizzes
15 percent progress and participation

I don't give grades - you earn them. Your work will be graded according to the university’s high standards, with more tolerance at the start of the course and less as we go along. In other words, your progress will be a good part of your final grade. If you're doing C or D work early in the semester, I'm looking for A or B work at the end.. For example, if you start out getting Ds and Cs and head into the homestretch with consistent Bs, you're likely to get a B.

To be successful in this course, you should expect to devote an average of 10-14 hours each week to preparing for class, participating in class sessions, studying course related materials, and completing course assignments.
Here are some keys to getting a good grade: writing clearly and accurately; spelling correctly and using grammar correctly; participating in discussions; coming to class; scoring well on quizzes and tests; showing effort and interest.

Here are some ways to get an automatic F: misspelling a proper name; writing papers with major factual errors; not participating in class; earning poor quiz and test grades; showing little effort or interest; missing a deadline; misspelling the following: accommodate, occurred, a lot, receive and its (as a possessive). Remember, It's only when it is. Also, you will lose five to 10 points if you use the following words in your papers: really, great, very and awesome. Do not use those words unless they are part of a direct quotation. Ask me why.

Second chances: You get one shot at rewriting an F grade on a paper. That effort is due by the next class period. You must submit the original along with the rewrite. The rewrite counts one grade lower than it might otherwise have earned. In other words, if you turn in an A rewrite, it goes in the book as a B.

Grading key:
A -- outstanding work that requires minimal editing.
B -- above average work that requires five or fewer minor editing changes before publishing.
C -- average work that requires substantial editing and no more than one rewriting effort before publishing.
D -- unacceptable work that contains multiple errors and requires extensive editing and rewriting before possible publication.
F -- see the note above.

Other grading information:
Numerically, this is how I will break down your grades:

A+ = 98-100; A = 92-97; A- = 90-91
B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81
C+ = 78-79; C = 72-77; C- = 70-71
D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61
F = 59 and below

Pluses and minuses may be added to your grade based on the following: extra effort - or lack thereof; progress - or lack thereof; excellent class participation - or poor participation; completed extra credit work of B or better; tardiness. The plus grade generally recognizes work that's a bit higher than grade level. The minus grade is often for work that is just below grade level, but can also be used to recognize enterprise and achievement. For example, a student with letter grade of C+ who has shown progress, enterprise, etc., can get boosted to a B-. Conversely, a student with A grades who doesn't participate in class, shows up late, etc., could wind up with an A-.
HONESTY AND PLAGIARISM

Unless I tell you otherwise, do your own work in this course. Attribute information that comes from other sources. When in doubt, ask me. **Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation, as well as a grave breach of trust. Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.**

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

This is a guideline; we will discuss changes in class or via email, and we will always make room to include anything that is particularly newsworthy. We plan to have guest speakers, too, and the schedule challenges they have may require us to be flexible with our assignments.

**Week 1:** introduction, cutting through spin, spin exercise, basics of journalism  
**Week 2:** Basics of journalism and story writing, watch “the Reporter”  
**Week 3:** “Elements of Journalism,” story writing, work on first news-style paper  
**Week 4:** “Elements,” **first news-style paper due,** select oral presentation topic  
**Week 5:** “Muckraking,” work on oral presentation (**go to speech center!**)  
**Week 6:** “Muckraking,” **oral presentations**  
**Week 7:** **First test,** “Ted Talk” introductions,  
**Week 8:** “A Force for Good” readings, fall break  
**Week 9:** “A Force for Good,” select second news-style paper,  
**Week 10:** work on second news-style paper, start Ted Talk selection  
**Week 11:** Watch “The Insider,” **second news-style paper due**  
**Week 12:** “Just Mercy,” select Pulitzer Prize articles, work on Ted Talks  
**Week 13:** “Just Mercy,” select Pulitzer Prize articles, work on Ted Talks  
**Week 14:** Ted Talks presentations, journalism and citizenship  
**Week 15:** Wrap-up, writing help, **second test**

**Final paper is due during scheduled exam time**

Remember, I will work with you on your papers at every step. On most assignments, I am available to coach you by e-mail before your work is due. Ask for assistance and you will receive it. Don't wait until the last minute. I will work with you like an editor on your papers before they are graded. I care about good writing and I want you to write well. If you are eager to help yourself, I am eager to help you.