

## **JOUR 377 Practicum**

**Instructor: Robert Hodierno**

**Friday, 10:30-11:20, Weinstein 303; 12:00-12:50, Weinstein 105**

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**Office: Weinstein 424**

**Office hours: M, W 2:00-5:00**

This is one of the most important journalism courses that you will take. You're initiating, researching and writing stories in and for the real world, and you're responsible for their significance, clarity and above all, their accuracy. Your name is on them. Several thousand people will read them. They will make judgments about you.

If journalism is your career choice, your clips will be more important to a news employer than your GPA, your letters of recommendation or your connections. If you have other plans, significant published work demonstrates that you can think, research and write for a demanding audience. Those skills are a ticket to graduate school, law school, or the kind of job you'd rather have. Break some great stories this semester. Take pride in your work.

Read the **Collegian Manual**, and know it well. Attendance in class is mandatory. Collegian editors, this includes you.

**Assignments:** During the course of the semester you will produce eight stories for the paper version of The Collegian. For three weeks of the semester you will be assigned to The Collegian Web site. Working for the Web site means you will be on call, ready to react to breaking news on little or no notice. Editors in the class will do five print stories and work online for two weeks. Assistant editors will do six stories and work online for three weeks.

Your print story assignments will be e-mailed to you by 5 p.m. on Wednesdays and your finished story will be due nine days later at the beginning of class on Fridays. Stories should be sent to [collegianstories@richmond.edu](mailto:collegianstories@richmond.edu) and to [rhodiern@richmond.edu](mailto:rhodiern@richmond.edu). Do not pursue your own story ideas unless you get approval from the editors. Do not switch stories without approval from the editors. Come to class Friday ready to talk about your assigned story.

As a general guideline for print stories we want multiple sources. Single-source stories are not acceptable. A good target length is 800 words. Far

too often rookie writers ramble on at excessive length. Online stories should be in the 400 word range.

If you would like to produce a video or audio slide show for The Collegian Web site, present a story idea for that project. If accepted, that will count the same as a print story.

Edited print stories with serious problems will be e-mailed to writers on Monday evenings and need to be sent back to [collegianstories@richmond.edu](mailto:collegianstories@richmond.edu) by 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Whether you are assigned to the print product or the Web site, you will be responsible for coming up with one good story idea per week. A “good story idea” does mean suggesting some scheduled campus event. It means an enterprise story. Story ideas should be sent to [rhodiern@richmond.edu](mailto:rhodiern@richmond.edu) as well as [collegianstories@richmond.edu](mailto:collegianstories@richmond.edu).

Your practicum stories will be assessed separately by Collegian editors and by me. Your grade on a story for this class is not related to how Collegian editors use it or whether it is published at all.

You will cover different topics so that you can have a diverse reporting and writing experience.

### **GRADES:**

The practicum course and The Collegian are separate entities. Students enrolled in this course may be hired by the editors as reporters. You will be required to sign a **reporter’s contract** at the beginning of the semester, outlining the expectations of the job. In addition to the requirements listed in this syllabus, you also are obligated to follow the guidelines in that contract. If your writing isn’t up to par, or if you miss deadlines, the managing editor has the authority to fire you from your contract position. You could also quit the paper, though no one ever has. That means you could end up writing stories to fulfill the class assignment, but those stories cannot be published.

Your stories will be returned to you with a letter grade. In addition to the overall quality of the story, other factors in your course grade include: submitting weekly news story ideas, following the procedures outlined in the syllabus and reporting contract, following basic journalism procedures, communicating adequately with editors and sources, attributing information appropriately and making deadlines. Misspelling proper names, or making any factual errors, is an automatic F.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

You must begin working on your story as soon as you get the assignment. You don't want to take a chance that key people you need for your story will be unavailable. Make the initial contact, find out where people are or how they can be reached, and get to work. Always identify yourself as a Collegian reporter immediately and explain briefly and clearly what your story is about. If there is some reason that you cannot complete the assignment, immediately contact the managing editor. You may not swap stories with other reporters unless the editor approves, so you must get a new assignment quickly to meet your deadline. If you fail to get a new assignment, you fail for the week.

### **DEADLINES:**

The deadline for turning in stories is class time on Fridays for that week's production schedule. A late story gets a C at best. Do not ask me for an extension. If you need an extension ask your assigning editor. The deadline for requesting an extension is Friday class time. When requesting an extension, you must state the specific reason you need it, and you must CC me on that request.

### **FORMATS:**

You get a story slug with your assignment. Keep track of your story slug, so that the Collegian editors can find your story in the computer. **Do not change the one-word slug name for any reason.**

On all stories, you must:

1. Always write your full name at the top of your story just as you would want it to appear in a byline. Include the date at the top of the story. Also include the story slug and the word count. The top left corner of your story should look like this:

**Jane Doe**  
**1/25/07**  
**Gym**  
**420 words**

2. All stories must be sent as **Microsoft Word attachments** to your e-mail.

3. Always list at the end of the story the names and phone numbers of sources quoted in the story. That enables editors to call them if there are questions or deadline developments. **Failure to include this source list will cost you two letter grades.** When you list sources and phone numbers at the bottom of your stories, also indicate how you made

contact with that person. If by phone, write (tel) after the name. If by personal interview, write (per) after the name. Follow this example:

**Mike London (tel) 287 6846**

**Steve Bisese (per) 289 8615**

**Max Vest (per) 298 8507**

Note: Whenever possible, it is better to interview someone in person than on the phone. **Do not do e-mail interviews.**

4. Always "cq" each proper name, number or statistic that can be checked to show editors that you have carefully checked these things. Example: Officer Joseph (cq) Groome (cq) said the driver was Jason (cq) Creech, 24.(cq) Creech(cq) stopped near Arby's (cq) on Quioccasin Road (cq) and shot at four stray dogs, Groome (cq) said.

5. Don't interview friends, family or roommates: Do not choose roommates, sorority sisters, fraternity brothers or fellow members of some athletic team as contacts for a story you're assigned. If you are assigned a story in which you have a conflict of interest, ask for a new assignment right away. You must develop the skills needed to obtain information from people you don't know. **Fair warning:** failure to follow this policy means you will fail for the week. Also, remember, **there are no one-source stories.** Ever. There are no two-source stories without approval from an editor. Books and Web sites do not count as sources in this policy.

6. Photos, graphics: Find out if a Collegian photographer is assigned to your story. Encourage the photographer to accompany you on assignment. You'll get better pictures that way because the photographer will have a better sense of the story.

7. Write a one-sentence headline suggestions at the top of your stories and marking optional trim sections.

8. Never turn over a notebook, or a story, to a source. Ever.

### **PLAGIARISM:**

It is unethical to take someone else's work without permission. It is also an honor code violation. You may use material from other sources as long as you give credit. Never present fictional interviews or quotes as factual material. **If you are involved in any form of plagiarism, you automatically will fail this course.** This has taken on new significance in recent years with the ease of obtaining information from the Internet.

If you have any questions, please check with me before handing in assignments.

### **Several quick points on plagiarism:**

\*You may not borrow words, phrases, quotes, headlines or even ideas from another source without attribution.

\*You must clearly tell readers where all of your information comes from. All information obtained from interviews must be attributed to those sources. Any descriptive writing must be based on personal observation or attributed to a source. Any piece of information that is not obtained from first-hand reporting must be attributed to a specific secondary source.

\*Quotes are always presumed to be the result of a face-to-face interview, unless otherwise stated. If a quote in your story is lifted from a press release or Web site without attribution, that is plagiarism. (On a related topic, all interviews should be done in person. In the unlikely event you must use a quote from a phone or e-mail interview, it must be noted in the story.) **Ex. Smith said in a phone interview.**

\*Even if you are present at an event, such as a press conference, you may not use a secondary source or fact-check your information against another source without attribution. For example, if you attend a press conference but you are not confident in the quotes you obtain, you may not pull those quotes from another publication, broadcast or individual classmate/reporter without attributing them to that secondary source.

\*Because your stories will be published, it is even more important that you understand the boundaries and follow them meticulously. Your work, as well as all reporters' work, represents a public trust, not just your own private responsibility.

### **Story Ideas:**

The best story assignments are generated by reporters. I expect you to be the eyes and ears of The Collegian. You need to write your story ideas as if you were an editor giving an assignment to a reporter. In essence, you need to tell the reporter what the story idea is, why it is important, what angle should be explored and what contacts should be pursued. These story ideas need to be thorough, which means they

should be at least a half page. Do not turn in a lazy, undeveloped idea such as this:

"D-hall was closed all weekend. Something happened."

Here's a good quick way to turn that into something solid:

"D-hall was closed all day Saturday and Sunday. One of the D-hall workers said it appeared a construction worker hit a gas line while working on the renovation. According to several witnesses, several hundred students had to be evacuated during breakfast on Saturday morning. There were fire trucks in front of the building all weekend. What happened? Was there a gas line accident? Was it serious? Has it been fixed? Will service continue to be disrupted? Were there any injuries? Has this incident delayed the renovation process? What is being done to prevent such an incident again? Interview building and grounds personnel, the construction manager, D-hall employees, students who were in the dining room at the time, other campus administrators. Check to see if these types of incidents are common during construction projects.

You need to e-mail your story ideas to me and to The Collegian editors by 5 p.m. each Tuesday. **There are no extensions on these.** To be sure you'll get credit for these, send the story ideas inside the body of an e-mail, and in the e-mail subject line, put "Story idea for week of 9/25."

**Attendance:** If you miss no classes and you do all your stories on time during the semester, I will bump up your final course grade a half level. Example, if you earn a B, I will give you a B+.