Journalism 377 is a writing-based course with a significant publication requirement designed to build on the skills you’ve learned in other journalism classes. Some of you will publish your first stories and others of you will continue to build your portfolios with good story clips. Your clips will mean as much as your GPA to any prospective employer in the news business. In most cases, your clips will mean more.

This course is designed to help you enhance your versatility as a writer and hone the skills needed to be a successful journalist able to publish a diverse array of stories in a variety of platforms. You will learn how to pitch story ideas to editors, how to write at a higher level, how to rewrite to meet the needs of a publication and how to sell yourself as an accomplished, experienced news and feature writer.

Your stories will be directed at a variety of audiences and publications. The Collegian might be your main outlet, though the decision to publish your stories is at the discretion of Collegian editors. (See addendum from Collegian editors at the end of the syllabus.) You also will be required to seek publication opportunities in other outlets, which we will discuss further in class.

I will spend time carefully evaluating your stories. The stories you write in this course will be published with your names on them. Readers - fellow students, teachers, administrators, future employers - will form impressions of you and your skills based on these stories.

If you want to do well in this course, expect to spend at least 10-14 hours each week outside of class - developing story ideas, writing stories and reading each other’s stories to get ready for class discussions and critiques. I want you to develop a sharper eye for what makes a good story and a thicker skin for learning how to improve your work.

**STORY PITCHES**

Story ideas are not assigned to you automatically. It is your responsibility to pitch a story idea to a publication, on campus or off campus. These pitches need to be well-developed if you want to increase your chances of getting assignments. A weak pitch that doesn’t lead to a story assignment is a waste of your time and slows down your quest for published words. Pitches should be between 100 and 250 words, describe your story in depth, and include specific details about the way you intend to pursue a story, including why your targeted publication should be interested in your work. A good story pitch should “sell” the piece by giving editors what they need to decide if the story is worth pursuing and why you are the right person to write it. We will spend time in class discussing each other’s pitches with the goal of helping each other to produce the best possible work to increase your chances of getting published.

It is up to you to manage the flow of your pitches and assignments. This means you shouldn’t wait until one story is completed before you start looking for your next story idea. Try to avoid long gaps between assignments. As you’re working on stories, you should always be looking for your next idea.
The number of pitches you write will depend on the success of each pitch, as well as the word count assigned for your accepted pitches. However, you are required to write four well-developed pitches for off-campus publications – one each month between September and December. Note: if the pitches are well-written and professional, you will receive credit for them even if the off-campus publication doesn’t assign you the story. Although you are required to try to get assignments at publications other than The Collegian, you are not required to fulfill any of your word quota off-campus. Also note that pitches do not count toward your published words quota.

You must copy me on all pitches to The Collegian, and send me copies of your pitches to other publications. Pitches to The Collegian go to collegianstories@gmail.com. Pitches are 20 percent of your grade and assessed on a check-plus/check/check-minus scale.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There is a tiered system for required word counts. You will be required to publish at least 4,500 words over the course of the semester unless you are on the Collegian staff or on staff at another recognized publication. If you are a Collegian staffer, or working at an off-campus internship, you are required to publish at least 4,000 words this semester. The requirement for Collegian editors is 3,500.

In addition to the total word count required by the end of the semester, you are also required to meet a minimum word count of 1,000 words by the last day of September and a total of 2,000 words by the end of October. This is designed to help you spread out your workload instead of writing in a panic in November. You are free to move faster than that if you want.

Please note the at least above. More high-quality work is always welcome and can only help as you prepare yourself for your future. Exceeding the required word count can also help improve your grade. Once you reach your required count, stories with better grades can replace stories that weren’t as strong.

The word count is not dependent on the number of stories you write. I would encourage you to vary the length and style of your pieces to give you the most diverse portfolio possible.

Writing assignments are worth 60 percent of your grade. Your grade will be determined by the finished story you send to me, not the piece that has gone through the copy editing and production process. You should always send me the original version of your work before it has gone through any editing process. However, there will be times when the original version is not the one I grade for class. We will discuss this on a case-by-case basis. Please remember: the first version I receive from you must be the original, unedited version.

Follow the instructions from your editors about procedures and protocols – for example, I want your stories sent to me in a Word document, but other places might not want a Word document. Make sure you continue to communicate with editors after you turn in the initial story. Answer their questions promptly, make any necessary changes and always keep me in the loop.

Strong and timely communication is essential in this course. You must check your email regularly, and you must respond to emails quickly. No email from me, or from an editor, should be left unanswered for 24 hours.
You need to include a complete source list at the bottom of each story, including full name, address, phone number and method of interview (in person, phone, email, etc). I require this on the version you give me, and most editors are likely to want this as well.

The grades you earn in this class are not related to how editors at The Collegian or elsewhere use your stories or how they may edit your work. In other words, an A in class doesn’t always mean you’ve scored a front-page story. Likewise, a front-page story doesn’t always mean an A. There could easily be situations where a published story with praise from an editor could earn an F because you failed to meet a classroom protocol.

Make sure everyone you interview knows that the story is intended for publication. Do not explain your interviews as a class exercise. That will give sources the false impression that the stories are unlikely to be published. Publication is a requirement for passing this class. (See word count explanation above)

Also, do not introduce yourself as a Collegian reporter unless you are already on staff. Students in this class are in a unique position that requires careful and professional explanation while conducting interviews. We will discuss this more in class.

PLAGIARISM
Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation, as well as a grave breach of trust with readers, the instructor and yourself. Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.

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. **Any piece of information that is not obtained from eyewitness reporting must be attributed to a specific secondary source.**

* If a quote in your story is lifted from a press release or website without attribution, that is plagiarism.

* 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.
Please ask if you have any questions or any hesitation about a situation. I am always happy to discuss this topic and clear up any possible confusion before it becomes a problem.

GRADING SCALE

You will be graded according to the following standard (as published by the Poynter Institute):

- **A:** Publishable in current form with few or no revisions
- **A-/B+:** Publishable with minor work
- **B:** Solid elements; will be publishable with some rehabbing
- **B-/C+:** Some serious flaws but other strengths; publishable with reasonable work
- **C:** Major flaws; needs overhaul before being publishable
- **D:** Critical errors; would not be considered publishable without dramatic change
- **F:** Work not completed, lacks merit over-all, was late, or misspelled a personal or business name

AUTOMATIC F’s:

**Misspellings of proper names or major factual errors mean an automatic F. Yes, that sometimes means otherwise outstanding stories will flunk.**

Other ways to automatically fail an assignment include:
1. Inadequate attribution
2. Submitting a one-source story
3. Continuously relying on email interviews
4. Failing to include a complete source list
5. Numerous copy-editing and grammar errors
6. Failing to send your stories to the correct places
7. Giving your notebook or story to a source
8. Missing deadlines
9. Misleading a source about your intentions or the focus of the story
10. Failing to communicate properly with the instructor or editors
11. Committing any error that falls under the plagiarism umbrella
12. Failing to avoid conflicts of interest
13. Failing to follow professional protocols discussed in class
14. Failing to follow the protocols outlined in this syllabus

TIPS, SUGGESTIONS, WORDS TO THE WISE, ETC.

Make you sure you understand how to identify conflicts of interest. Don't interview friends and roommates. Do not choose sorority sisters, fraternity brothers or fellow members of an 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.

Quotes are always presumed to be the result of a face-to-face interview, unless otherwise stated. Interviews should be done in person. If you must use a phone interview, it must be noted in the story. Email interviews are generally not allowed and must be discussed in advance with me, as well as your editors in some cases.

**Fair warning: There are no one-source stories. You must interview and include information from a minimum of three people.**

Any use of anonymous sources must be discussed in advance with me, as well as with the editor of the publication. For example, the Collegian has a policy that reporters must get in touch with the editor-in-chief immediately if they are even considering using an anonymous source, or if a source requests anonymity. No story will be published unless the identities of all sources are known to the editor. Do NOT promise anonymity to anyone without first consulting both me and your story editor.

Photos, graphics: News outlets need art to accompany most stories. Find out if a 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 what the story is about. If there is no photographer assigned to your story, take your own photographs.

Note: the Collegian has a policy that writers must submit a horizontal photograph with all stories. Unless otherwise discussed with a Collegian editor, a story without a photo will not be published. A phone quality photo is fine in many cases.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION**

Showing up for class and actively participating in discussions is an essential part of success and prepares you for what you will encounter after graduation. This portion of class counts for 20 percent of your grade.

When we meet, we will work on improving every aspect of your work, including sharpening pitches, crafting good questions, interviewing, writing and rewriting. I aim to approach our meetings as a combination newsroom planning meeting/writer’s workshop. You are expected to read The Collegian daily and come to class prepared to talk about each other’s stories. For classmates’ stories that are published elsewhere, I will send copies to the class.

Attendance is mandatory, of course. For every three classes that you miss, your final grade will drop by one full letter grade. If you miss five classes, you will fail the course.

**KICKER**

This is a demanding class, but it also has the potential to help you build a portfolio of published work, which leads to internships and jobs. Think carefully about your goals for this class, and remember, I am here to help.
I. REQUIREMENTS
A. Please send your finished article in a Word document to “collegianstories@gmail.com.” If you are NOT already a member of Collegian staff, our editor will put your article into a Google doc and add the necessary editors. That way, you will be able to easily check and reply to our edits. If you are a member of staff, please upload your article to CEO as you would normally do, in addition to sending your article in a Word document to “collegianstories@gmail.com.” All contact after article submission will be between you and the corresponding section editor.
B. The Collegian reserves the right to halt or “kill” an article’s publication at any point in the reporting, writing and editing process. We will not publish your article if:
   1. It is in clear violation of one of our ethical guidelines (detailed below)
   2. A Collegian editor has contacted you in regards to your article and you do not respond in some manner within 24 hours.

II. BASIC COMPONENTS FOR EVERY ARTICLE
A. Must have at least three sources
B. Must be accompanied by a photo. To arrange a photo, please contact our visual editor, Kiersten Ness, via email [kiersten.ness@richmond.edu] or phone [860-692-8192]

III. STYLE GUIDELINES
A. All Collegian articles follow basic AP style, which you should be very familiar with from copy editing. Here is a link to the style guide.
B. You will also receive a link to the most updated version of our style guide, which addresses campus-specific style concerns.

IV. ETHICAL GUIDELINES
A. Anyone you interview for an article must pass the “lunch rule.” In other words, if you might text this person on a random day to get lunch, then you’re too close with them and they cannot be an unbiased source. There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. If you feel like you have one, please talk with your editor.
B. Please refrain from promising or granting anonymity or on-background status to a source. Anonymity means the person will be quoted in the article but not named. On-background means the source can be quoted directly, but not named, with the quote instead being attributed to the source’s position relevant to the article. Using these two levels of attribution is a decision to be made only by top editors. You may not promise either of these two designations to a source under any circumstances, without getting prior permission from the editor-in-chief.
Please do not conduct any interviews over email. They go against best journalistic practice. Please talk with your editor if you feel like there is absolutely no other way to speak to this person and they are an essential part of your story.