

JOUR 377
Community-Based Journalism
Weinstein 418
TR 9-10:15 a.m.

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Journalism 377 is a writing and reporting 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 while others will continue to improve your portfolios. Your published work will mean as much as your GPA to prospective news employers. In most cases, this published work will mean more.

This course is shaped to enhance your versatility as a writer and hone the professional skills needed to publish a variety of stories across different platforms. You will learn how to pitch story ideas to editors, write at a higher level, rewrite to meet the needs of a publication, and sell yourself as an accomplished, experienced news and feature writer.

Your stories can 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 are also encouraged to seek publication opportunities in other outlets, which we'll discuss in class.

I'll carefully evaluate your stories and offer detailed feedback. 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, reporting and writing stories, and reading each other's work 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 automatically. It is your responsibility to pitch a story to a publication, on campus or off campus. These pitches need to be well-developed to increase your chances of getting assignments. Pitches should be between 100 and 250 words and describe your story succinctly. Include details about how you intend to pursue a story and specify why your targeted publication should be interested. A pitch should "sell" the piece by giving editors the information 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 your pitches.

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 or working on your next story idea. Avoid long gaps between assignments.

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. 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 10 percent of your grade and assessed on a check-plus/check/check-minus scale.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You are required to publish at least 4,500 words during 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.

You should meet a minimum word count of 1,000 words by Sept. 30 and at least 2,000 by Oct. 20.

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

The word count is not dependent on the number of stories you write. Vary the length and style of your pieces to build the most diverse portfolio possible. We'll discuss some strategies for this in class.

Writing assignments are worth 70 percent of your grade. Your grade will be determined by the finished story you send me, not the piece that has gone through copy editing and production. You should always send me the original version of your work before any editing. There may be exceptions that we will discuss on a case-by-case basis. **Please remember: the first version I receive from you must be the original, unedited version. Send your story to me in a Word document, in Times New Roman 12, and double-spaced. In the upper left place your name, story slug (one or two-word description), your email, and phone number. Include a headline for your story above the text.**

Follow separate instructions from your editors about how they want the copy formatted and other protocols. Make sure you continue to communicate with editors after you turn in the 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 regularly check your email and respond quickly. **No email from me, or from an editor, should be left unanswered for 24 hours. This will directly affect your participation grade and it could also indirectly affect your grades on stories.**

Include a complete source list at the bottom of each story, with 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. For example, a story that is featured prominently by The Collegian doesn't necessarily earn 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. Likewise, a solid story could get reduced to a blurb by an editor because of a development beyond your control. That story would not necessarily earn a poor grade as a result.

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.

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 and FABRICATED MATERIAL

Plagiarism and presenting fabricated material as factual are honor code violations, as well as grave breaches of trust with readers, the instructor and yourself. Both are 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 these 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

Writing: 70 percent

Pitches: 10 percent

Participation: 20 percent

Your writing 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 overall, 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 notes 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, family, roommates, suitemates or classmates. Do not choose sorority sisters, fraternity brothers or fellow members of any organization or 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. If you're unsure if someone represents a conflict, just ask me. 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. Because of COVID and related protocols, there may be times you will need to conduct interviews through Zoom or make other adjustments. We will discuss this more in class.

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 organizations 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. 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, developing good questions, interviewing, writing and rewriting. I aim to approach our meetings as a combination newsroom planning meeting/writer's workshop. We'll consult as the semester gets under way to decide which topics best meet your needs. Come to class ready to brainstorm article ideas and lead the discussion, which all of you will do on a rotating basis. This means you should be familiar with what has been covered in The Collegian and outside publications that have insights on what types of stories we can best cover. We'll have guest speakers during the semester, and I'll assign some short readings on current topics in journalism.

OFFICE HOURS

My office hours will be from 3 to 5 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, and by appointment on Friday. I'm generally flexible and can meet at other times.

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.

COLLEGIAN ADDENDUM

I. REQUIREMENTS

1. Pitches: Send story pitches to “collegianstories@gmail.com” and copy professor Kapsidelis on the email. The managing editor will reply either accepting or rejecting your pitch. If accepted, you will be emailed a section, deadline and word count. Please do your best to meet deadlines. If you are unable to meet a deadline, communicate this to the managing editor *before the deadline*.
2. 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.
3. 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 our [Ethics and Policies](#)
 2. A Collegian editor has contacted you about your article and you do not respond in some manner within 24 hours.

II. BASIC COMPONENTS FOR EVERY ARTICLE

1. Must have at least three sources
2. Must be accompanied by a photo. To arrange a photo, please contact our visual editor.

III. STYLE GUIDELINES

1. All Collegian articles follow basic AP style, which you should be familiar with from copy editing.
2. For University of Richmond-specific information, follow the 2020-21 Collegian Style and Usage Guide. Pay specific attention to the Style and Usage: Quick Reference section and the revised/added entries.

IV. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

1. Conflicts of interest: Do not interview friends, family, your former or current professors, a student who shares membership with you in any student organization or on-campus employment, people who are on The Collegian staff, etc. As a general rule, if you would comfortably get lunch with someone, then that person

may not be a source for your article. *There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. If you feel like you have one, please talk with your editor.*

2. 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 or managing editor.*
3. Please refrain from conducting 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. *Do not agree to an email interview unless approved by your editor to do so.*