Journalism 377 is where 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 some cases, your clips will mean more.

This course is designed to help you 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 story is at the discretion of Collegian editors. You also will have the opportunity to seek publication in other outlets, which we will discuss 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**

Each week, you should produce at least one story pitch of between 100 and 250 words. Describe your story in depth, be specific in the way you intend to pursue it and detail what publication would be most 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. These weekly pitches are due on Mondays by 5 p.m.

Please note: if you have a story idea with a pressing time element, go ahead and send it before this deadline. For example, if you hear on Saturday about an incident in a dorm involving police, you can send that pitch to The Collegian right away, copying me on the email. If you wait until Monday, the news will be old and someone else may already have written the story.

For Collegian stories, send your pitches to: collegianstories@gmail.com. Please include the word “practicum” in the subject line.
Copy me on all pitches to The Collegian or other publications. Pitches are 25 percent of your grade and assessed on a check-plus/check/check-minus scale.

NOTE: if you are working on a multi-week story and do not need to pitch a new story for yourself, submit a news tip to The Collegian that can be assigned to another reporter. You must submit either a story pitch or a news tip each week throughout the semester. Include “practicum” as well as either “pitch” or “tip” in the subject line. Copy me on everything.

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, you are required to publish at least 4,000 words this semester. The requirement for Collegian editors is 3,500. If you have an off-campus internship, you will fall somewhere between those two figures.

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 50 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-base basis. Please remember: the first version I receive from you must be the original, unedited version.

For Collegian stories, send to collegianstories@gmail.com in a Word document. Make sure you include the word “practicum” in the subject line. Copy me when you send the story, and also copy me on all communications with editors about your stories.

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.

Double-space all copy. On each page, write your name in the upper left-hand corner, along with the slug and the page number. There will be points deducted automatically for missing formats. Your assignments should look like this:
If the story is more than one page, write “more” at the bottom. On the final page, use the symbol # at the end.

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).

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

**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 or email interview, it must be noted in the story.

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

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.

**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 25 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.