



CM/JR 300 TRUTH TELLING: ETHICAL JOURNALISM IN THE AGE OF INSTANT MEDIA

IES Abroad Rome

DESCRIPTION:

This course explores the foundations of professional journalism, and critically examines – through practical trial – the bases of the ethical code that developed out of the practice of the journalistic profession in the age of print, and undergirded the best journalism through the mass media age. The course will focus on developments in communications technology and the effects these have had on the culture, asking whether journalism as it has traditionally been understood and practiced is still possible within the contemporary culture and environment.

CREDITS: 3

CONTACT HOURS: 45

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Class sessions will be discussion based and intensely participatory, with the traditional lecture format largely replaced by a “newsroom” format of structured debate with the professor in the role of “editor-in-chief.” Successful students will listen carefully and engage constantly, developing their ability to express ideas forcefully while being respectfully – though sometimes harshly – critical of their own, their peers’, and their professor’s ideas.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation – 10%
- Writing Assignments – 30%
- Mid-term – 30%
- Final – 30%

Class Participation

There will be a “news roundup” at the beginning of each class session, in which students will be required to identify and discuss the major news stories in each geopolitical and cultural region.

*Course-related Trips: Students will receive, no less than one week before each excursion, a “briefing packet” from the professor, which will contain details regarding the “5 Ws” of the session’s course-related excursion venue. The general purpose of the excursion is to offer exposure to practical journalism – to allow students to “see what we’ve been talking about” in class: the specific outside-of-class work assignments roughly corresponding to the scheduled excursion days are designed to elicit indicia of understanding and – most importantly – of students’ critical appropriation of journalistic craft and process.

Writing Assignments

Students will be required to submit a writing assignment, in the form of a news story, news analysis piece, or opinion essay, for each class session. The professor will choose 1-3 pieces from among the submissions and moderate a discussion of the selected pieces’ strengths and weaknesses at the next class meeting.

Written assignments will receive a two-tiered evaluation: the professor and/or other class members will read and “red pen” written assignments as they are completed; the professor will read them and offer a “global” evaluation based on improvement at the end of the semester, with an eye toward measuring development of basic journalistic craft. Deadlines are deadlines: late assignments will not be accepted under any circumstances.



Midterm and Final Exams

The mid-term and final exams will be in-class and of the “forced essay” format, with the students presented with five prompts, from which they shall choose two: the prompts will include two choices on questions of journalistic ethics, and three choices drawn from current news items apt to elicit evidence of informed critical/analytical acumen. Students will choose one ethical and one analytical prompt.

Grading Rubric for Course Participation:

A	Excellent participation The student’s contributions reflect an active reading of the assigned bibliography. Skillfully synthesizes the main ideas of the readings and raises questions about the applications and implications of the material. Demonstrates, through questions and comments, that he or she has been capable of relating the main ideas in the readings to the other information discussed in the course, and with his or her own life experience. The student makes informed judgments about the readings and other ideas discussed in class, providing evidence and reasons. He/she respectfully states his/her reactions about other classmates’ opinions, and is capable of contributing to the inquiry spiral with other questions. The student gets fully involved in the completion of the class activities.
B	Very good participation The student’s contributions show that the assigned materials are usually read. Most of the time the main ideas are identified, even though sometimes it seems that applications and implications of the information read were not properly reflected upon. The student is able to construct over others’ contributions, but sometimes seems to interrupt the shared construction to go over tangents. He/she is respectful of others’ ideas. Regularly involved in the activities but occasionally loses concentration or energy.
C	Regular participation The participant evidences a regular reading of the bibliography, but in a superficial way. He/she tries to construct over others’ ideas, but commonly provides comments that indicate lack of preparation about the material. Frequently, contributions are shallow or unarticulated with the discussion in hand.
F	Insufficient participation Consistently, the participant reads in a shallow way or does not read at all. Does not participate in an informed way, and shows lack of interest in constructing over others’ ideas.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course students will be able to:

- Identify the characteristic traits of journalism (as opposed to public intellectualism and “click bait”)
- Distinguish “straight reporting” from feature writing and opinion/editorial writing
- Recognize strong reporting and opinion writing
- Exercise powers of observation
- Take journalistic notes
- Self-edit and edit the work of others for synthesis
- Construct a news story under real deadline pressure



ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Attendance is mandatory for all IES classes, including course-related excursions. If a student misses more than two classes in this course, 2 percentage points will be deducted from the final grade for every additional absence. Any exams, tests, presentations, or other work missed due to student absences can only be rescheduled in cases of documented medical emergencies or family emergencies. IES will only consider extreme emergency cases and will strictly adhere to this policy.

CONTENT:

Week & Session	Content	Assignments & Reading
Week 1 Session 1	Course overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 1-5 in <i>Understanding Media</i>, pp.3-48
Session 2	The Lay of the Land – moderated class discussion on the nature of truth and its role in public discourse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 28-33 of <i>Understanding Media</i>, pp.275-346
Week 2 Session 1	Models of truth from mere fact to grand narrative	<p>500-word report on event observed about town (this is in lieu of the “daily filing” mentioned in the)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 1-3 in <i>News Flash</i>, pp.1-72
Session 2	Reading and critique of selected reports / moderated discussion on reporting vs. opinionating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 6-7 in <i>Understanding Media</i>, pp. 56-76 and Chs. 4-5 in <i>News Flash</i>, pp.73-95
Week 3 Session 1	Practical Journalism: on the record, off the record, on background – cultivating sources – corroborating statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 6-8 of <i>News Flash</i>, pp.115-200
Session 2	Course-related Trip: RAI, Radio Televisione Italiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 2 & 4 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp.37-46, 89-114
Week 4 Session 1	Know thyself: awareness of bias, prejudice, & uncritical presupposition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 18-21 in <i>Understanding Media</i>, pp. 170-216
Session 2	Walk-and-talk: “Know your subject – know your limits – know the difference: developing a ‘beat’ and preparing for a major interview”; course-related excursion: visit to SPC production centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 2 & 8 of <i>How to Write</i>, pp. 13-22, 79-86; Ch. 6 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp. 137-196
Week 5 Session 1	Finding the Story: covering news at the crossroads of politics, culture & society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 1 & 7 in <i>How to Write</i>, pp. 1-11, 71-78; Ch. 8 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp.197-232
Session 2	Course-related Trip: Reuters Bureau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. 9 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp.233-262
Week 6 Session 1	Mid-term Review	

Session 2	Mid-term Exam	
Week 7 Session 1	Editorial discretion: working with an editor and within an “editorial line” without losing your soul	Write a 5-sentence story pitch
Session 2	Group reading and critique of pitches	
Week 8 Session 1	Know what’s doing: the importance of keeping up with the news around the globe	Read and summarize top 5 news stories from three different news sources
Session 2	Walk-and-talk: “Know what’s doing, cont’d: the importance of general historical/cultural/political knowledge in running a newsroom/news desk” Course-related Trip: Press Office of the Holy See	Compare front pages of major print mastheads from Today, OTD 1992 and OTD 1967
Week 9 Session 1	Writing for your audience: News reporting in print and digital vs. News analysis in the same	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. 3 of <i>How to Write</i>, pp.23-34 Identify and criticize one news story and one news analysis piece in major print or text-based digital media covering the same story
Session 2	Moderated discussion on reportage vs. analysis vs. opinion in print/text-based digital media	Identify a breaking story in news media and give assignment breakdowns to an imaginary team of seven reporters
Week 10 Session 1	Writing for your medium: print/digital media vs. audio (radiophonic) vs. audiovisual media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chs. 4-6 in <i>How to Write</i>, pp.35-70 Pick 90- to 180-second audiovisual news report and write 300 words of copy on same news story for print and audio
Session 2	Course-related Trip: Mock Press Conference – Offices of // <i>Messaggero</i> , leading Italian language daily	Report – in print, audio or audiovisual medium – on “press conference”
Week 11 Session 1	Critical reflection, Pt. 1: “Old” vs. “New Media”: is “citizen journalism” really journalism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. 9 & Conclusion of <i>News Flash</i>, pp.201-236; Ch. 10 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp.263-292
Session 2	Critical reflection, Pt. 2: Tensions in the business – getting the story “out” vs. getting the story “right” – communications vs. journalism – journalism as professional service in the public interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch. 11 in <i>Journalism Next</i>, pp.293-316; <i>Federalist Papers</i> #1-6, pp.1-24 in Cambridge edition
Week 12 Session 1	Final Review Part 1	



Session 2	Final Review Part 2	
	Final Exam	

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- RAI, Radio Televisione Italiana
- Reuters Bureau
- Press Office of the Holy See
- Mock Press Conference – Offices of *Il Messaggero*, leading Italian language daily

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Anderson, Bonnie M. News Flash: Journalism, Infotainment and the Bottom-Line Business of Broadcast News. Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Briggs, Mark. Journalism Next: A Practical Guide to Digital Reporting and Publishing. CQ Press, 2010.
- Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison and John Jay. The Federalist: With Letters of Brutus. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media. The MIT Press, 1994.
- Sova, Dawn. How to Write Articles for Newspapers and Magazines. Thomson-ARCO, 2002.

Reading assignments shall be drawn from pertinent passages in the works in the required reading list above. These readings will be discussed in class. In addition, students will be responsible for developing a general understanding of world affairs, by reading carefully and thoroughly in the major news outlets. This constant attention to world affairs will add an element of “reading intensiveness” that, while difficult to quantify, shall be easily measured in class discussions.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Halberstam, David. The Powers that Be. University of Illinois, 2000.
- Orwell, George. Homage to Catalonia. Harcourt, 1952.
- Shirer, William. Berlin Diary. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002.
- Tiftt, Susan E. and Alex S. Jones. The Trust. Back Bay paperbacks, 2000.
- Woodward, Bob and Carl Bernstein. All the President’s Men. Simon & Schuster, 2014.