

Reporting

JOUR 3120-001

Spring 2025

Monday/Wednesday, 2:20-3:45 p.m.

Meeman Journalism Building 202

Prof. Casey Hilder

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Hours: Monday/Wednesday, 10:30-12:30 p.m.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Writing and reporting news and news feature stories using both traditional and new media techniques with an emphasis on developing sources and advanced skills for digital reporting.

Prerequisites

JRSM 2121

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

- “The Associated Press Stylebook 2020” Students should have this book from 2121. Earlier editions (2017-2019) are acceptable.
- A smart phone and access to a laptop or a desktop computer. Students cannot rely on using university computer labs. Journalists today need to be in constant contact with the Internet and social media, so make sure you have the devices to make that happen.
- A camera or smart phone for taking digital photographs.
- A clip-on Lavalier microphone for recording interviews for video and audio.
- The Commercial Appeal. Digital access available through University of Memphis McWherter Library. [Click here for access.](#)
- The Daily Memphian. Digital access available through University of Memphis McWherter Library. [Click here for access.](#)

Classroom format

Reporting 3120 develops the skills learned in media writing with increased emphasis on expert sources and alternative story telling. Reporters today need to work in different ways on multiple platforms, so this class integrates reporting and writing with photography, multimedia, social media and headline writing to accommodate both traditional and digital deliveries.

For 3120, students will report, write and produce content for a campus beat. In news, a beat is a type of specialized reporting that allows reporters to become experts on and develop sources in one area, such as politics, sports, food or business writing. By reporting on campus beats, students will have the opportunity to publish content on the new digital student newspaper, The DH.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:
<http://instructure.memphis.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 3120 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

Course Requirements

- Assignments will be completed both in and outside the classroom, so attendance and participation in class are vital. Class time is also valuable for discussions about news and upcoming assignments, so please be on time. Students who arrive more than 15 minutes late will be counted as absent.
- Here's how attendance works: I'm not interested in hearing excuses. You get three free passes during the semester. After you cash in the passes, missed classes are reflected in your final grade. For example, if you miss one additional class, your final grade drops a letter grade. If you miss two more classes, your grade drops again. So, if you miss six classes, your final grade drops two letters.
- Be sure to join our class Facebook page because if you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what is due. Do not count on me to answer texts, emails or Facebook posts about missed work. Consult a classmate, our Facebook page or online class resources.
- If you are unsure about deadlines, check the Canvas drop box dates. Do not rely on assignment dates printed on the syllabus.
- There are no exams in reporting, but quizzes may be given on assigned readings, classroom discussions, current events, and AP style.
- In addition to written and multimedia assignments, students update online portfolios built in JRSM 3900 to showcase their work and to facilitate internship placement. Portfolios include clips, design work, resumes and social media contacts.
- You must stay informed about the news and about newsmakers. It is impossible to be a good reporter unless you are informed about local, national and international news, as well as the media industry. Throughout the semester, we will focus on specific news sites, such as The New York Times, The Daily Memphian, The Commercial Appeal, CNN, NPR, Axios.com and so forth.
- Students who need additional help with writing mechanics will be required to attend mandatory sessions at the university's Writing Center.
- All assignments must be filed to the Canvas drop box by midnight (11:59 p.m.) on the day they are due. Late assignments will NOT be accepted. Do not send late assignments to instructor's email. It is extremely important that you recognize the importance of deadlines in news and learn to file assignments on time.
- All assignments must be written in third person in a structure that conforms to standard media writing guidelines. Assignments will be graded on content, sources, writing, story structure, word count, grammar, punctuation and AP style.
- Additionally, 10 points will be deducted for factual errors, such as misspelled names and incorrect dates. Get your facts straight!
- Additionally, all assignments must conform to these specifications: Stories must be filed in a word document, in Verdana 11 pt. type. Single space content. Do not indent. Leave a

space between paragraphs.

- And finally, assignments for 3120 may involve several components, such as a written story and a photo slideshow. You must complete all parts of the assignment to receive a grade. Instructors do not grade incomplete assignments, and students receive a zero for incomplete work.
- TECHNICAL SUPPORT: Computers and network access can be finicky. However, tech problems are not an acceptable reason for missing deadlines. As a University of Memphis student, you are entitled to help from the IT helpdesk. It is in your best interests to call as soon as you are aware of the problem. There are two ways to access the University of Memphis IT helpdesk: call 901-678-8888, or log in to the website (umhelpdesk.memphis.edu) to open a service ticket.

Grading

Class assignments: 80 percent (includes online portfolio)

Quizzes, homework, and in-class work: 20 percent

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%

B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%

C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%

D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%

F 0-59.4%

AI-assisted writing and ChatGPT use

ChatGPT and similar AI tools, though useful in many contexts, are inappropriate for use in this course. An important outcome of this course is to strengthen your own abilities as a thinker and writer. That is only possible when you do your own work. You may not submit work that is written wholly or partially by an AI tool. Assignment submissions may be run through AI detection software. If your submission appears to have been written using AI, you may either receive a failing grade or be asked to resubmit the assignment.

Other issues

More specific reporting and writing goals for this class include:

- Writing on deadline with ease and accuracy
- Developing sources on a beat
- Developing storytelling skills with words and photographs
- Polishing writing mechanics and AP style
- Reporting with social media
- Writing for digital media (headlines, captions, hyperlinks)
- Publishing stories in print and/or online
- Building professional online portfolios and media literacy

COURSE SCHEDULE

A flexible syllabus is necessary to respond to news events as they occur in real time. Deadlines for assignments may change, so check due dates regularly in the online drop box.

Week 1: Course introduction

Course overview & introductions

Week 2: Sources and story ideas for beats

Building a better beat

Week 3: Story structure, leads, setting up direct quotes

Developing a news story

Week 4: Writing on deadline

Editing and AP Style

Week 5: Storytelling with photographs and social media

Making social media work for you

Week 6: Headlines and hyperlinks

The importance of context

Week 7: Storytelling with photographs and video

The multimedia element and your secondary skills

Week 8: Fall Break

One class this week

Week 9: Trend Spotting

Digging deeper in the news

Week 10: Personality profiles and anecdotal leads

How to begin with a bang

Week 11: FOIA Primer

Information seeking like a pro

Week 12: Digital story formats

Identifying the best way to tell a story

Week 13: How to pitch your piece / Thanksgiving

Finding the best place for your story

Week 14: Portfolios

The power of the portfolio

Week 15: Last day of class

Updated portfolios due

What's next?

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 3120

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Present more meaningful context in stories through various forms of research and reporting
- Learn the nuances of interviewing expert local and national sources
- Balance views in stories to achieve fairness and accuracy
- Study alternative story-telling techniques
- Follow business and editorial developments in a wide range of media companies
- Understand the role of media in maintaining a democratic form of government

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Meet deadlines
- Improve interviewing, writing and reporting skills
- Refine grammar, punctuation, word usage, vocabulary and AP style knowledge
- Report and write multi-source stories for print and digital
- Develop multimedia storytelling techniques using photography, video and social media
- Write headlines and photo captions for stories and photo packages
- Understand importance of verification, attribution and accuracy in all completed projects
- Follow local, national, and international news
- Stay informed about developments in the media industry

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Recognize biases – both personal and professional – to ensure fair and accurate reporting practices
- Consume all types of media, including print and multi-media
- Compare how media companies report the news for different audiences

Understanding

- Explore the ethical responsibility of journalists and journalism in a democracy
- Understand newsworthiness as it applies to story development
- Learn the role of expert sources in reporting news stories

Application

- Develop a news beat
- Report and write news and feature stories with both local and national sources
- Include relevant data, photography and/or multi-media with all stories
- Include captions and headlines with all projects
- Submit rewrites for stories based on editing and discussion
- Publish stories in campus and citywide publications
- Update professional portfolios with course work for end-of-the-semester grading

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSJ 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact

- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.