

Topics in Convergence Journalism ***Business Reporting***

Fall 2016 • MW 3-4:20 • Don Morris 210 • 3 credit hours

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Course Description: Intensive study of an issue or current topic in modern journalism. Applies advanced journalism principles. May be repeated for a maximum of 6 hours of credit. Prerequisite: JMC 223, JMC 324

Specialized Description: Principles of business news coverage, including reporting specific to financial statements, public companies, economics, finance and banking, real estate, health care, technology, retailing and other industries. Developing processes to make complex information accessible to a general audience.

Course Objective

Learn advanced methods and tactics of journalism for print, video or audio storytelling for a specialized subject matter.

Learning Objectives, Competencies and Measurements

After completion of the course, students – at different levels of expertise as indicated by grade – will be able to:

- Develop an understanding of the history of business journalism. This competency will be measured through:
 - Performance in class discussion based on assigned course readings
 - Reading of a book by a business journalist about a specific business journalism topic and completion of a book report describing and analyzing the themes contained in the book
- Analyze and write about common business journalism subjects. This competency will be measured through:
 - Development, reporting and completion of several types of business stories, including news, features and in-depths
- Study and understand modern trends and current events affecting business journalism.
 - Performance in class discussion based on assigned course readings
 - Reading of a book by a business journalist about a specific business journalism topic and completion of a book report describing and analyzing the themes contained in the book

Intended Audience

This course is designed as an advanced newswriting course, building on the skills learned in JMC 223. It is designed for upper-level convergence journalism majors in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Outline of Topics

Topics covered in this course may include, but are not limited to:

- the role of business in the United States
- companies' financial performance
- information about private and public companies
- corporate press releases
- how a company is structured and the role of executives
- the relationship between business journalists and companies
- the relationship between companies and the regulators that oversee them
- documents ranging from analyst reports to court documents
- the unique ethical issues of being a business journalist
- how financial markets influence companies

Course Tools

Merrill Lynch (2000), How to Read a Financial Report.

Other readings provided by the professor

In addition, students will choose one of the following books by/about business reporters and write a three-page review:

- 24 Days: How Two Wall Street Journal Reporters Uncovered the Lies that Destroyed Faith in Corporate America. Rebecca Smith and John Emshwiler. Harper Collins. 2003.
- All the Devils Are Here, Bethany McLain and Joe Nocera, Portfolio, 2010.
- The Big Short, Michael Lewis, Norton, 2011
- The Frackers, Gary Zuckerman, 2013.
- Reckless Endangerment, Gretchen Morgenson, Times Books, 2011.
- Too Big to Fail, Andrew Ross Sorkin, Viking, 2009.

Grading

Grading scale

- A = 92-100
- B = 83-91
- C = 74-82
- D = 65-73
- F = Lower than 65

Grading calculations

The emphasis in this class will be on producing professional-quality journalistic writing. The grading system will reflect this emphasis:

- Business News Stories (2): 20%
- Business Leader Profile: 20%
- Abilene Small Business Profile: 20%
- Abilene Reporter-News Package story: 20%
- Business Journalism Book Review: 10%
- Class Participation: 10%

The Assignments

Business News Stories

- Students will pitch, report and write at least two 400-500-word business stories for publication in the Optimist or for submission to the Abilene Reporter-News. Stories can be related to any beat, but must meet professional reporting standards. or
- Students will script, produce and edit two 45-60-second broadcast business stories.

Business Leader Profile

- Students will choose one local business leader and write a 800-1000-word personality profile for publication in the Optimist or for submission to the Abilene Reporter-News.

Abilene Small Business Profile

- Students will choose one local business and write a 600-750-word profile for publication in the Optimist or for submission to the Abilene Reporter-News or they will produce one 1:30 package on a small business with narration, multiple interviews and b-roll.

Abilene Reporter-News Package story

- During the third or fourth week of the semester, students will meet with Abilene Reporter-News editor Doug Williamson to discuss a joint project related to some broad area of business reporting. The joint package will include six stories.

Business Journalism Book Review

- Students will read one book by business journalists about a specific industry and write a three-page review of the book, emphasizing the coverage of business strategy and the techniques of storytelling utilized by the author. Complete in APA style with appropriate citations.

Addendum related to Feature Writing

Students in the class may be paired or grouped with one or more other students to develop multi-pronged packages for use in the Optimist on topics that merit treatment through in-depth reporting and feature coverage. Students who are also in the feature writing class may use assignments in that class as a springboard for a separate story in this class, but the same story may not be turned in for credit in both classes. For example, if a student were doing a story about a particularly challenging economic development issue and wanted to also do a feature about an interesting person who will be affected by the issue that would be acceptable so long as professors in both classes are fully informed. Such synergy is encouraged, and will receive positive consideration in evaluation.

Story Guidelines

1. A minimum of two human sources is required for every story- more will be necessary for some.
2. You must include context when attributing statements to Web sites, press releases, etc. Here are some examples for attribution:

- according to a Web site sponsored by ...
- according to a press release from ...
- according to a report issued by ...
- according to a letter sent by ...

3. Student editors and reporters will not use e-mail as a primary interviewing tool but will do face-to-face interviews with all primary and second sources. The tool is not acceptable in the profession and cannot be accommodated by the JMC Network. E-mail may be used for follow-up questions, or as a means of forwarding pre-interview questions with a caveat to the source that questions might stray from the e-mail. Accuracy checks of direct quotes or technical data may be executed with sources via e-mail.

4. Make it accurate. Every sentence should be correct, so that every person on either side of a controversy could agree that each sentence is factually correct. Re-read every sentence to see if you think it is accurate on its own.

5. Get lots of information, more than you think you need. Write long; edit short. This always makes for a better story.

6. Attribute all statements of opinion, all value-laden terms, to the person whose opinion is being reflected in the statement.

Deadlines

Each assignment will have a specified deadline, many of which are included in the syllabus. Failure to turn a story in on time will result in an automatic letter-grade drop. Failure to complete an assigned story will result in a zero. A second zero will result in dismissal from the course. All assignments due in class will be due in the course dropbox by 10 a.m. that class day.

Other Information

Cell phones and other electronic devices will be turned off during class. Technology that distracts during class time will be confiscated.

During class time, students will not check or write personal email or work on assignments for other classes. The instructor will indicate specific times when computer monitors should be turned off to eliminate distraction.

Students should protect the confidentiality of passwords and ID cards; sharing them can result in denial of access and dismissal from the course. After-hours guests in the building and labs must have clearance from JMC chair. Do not prop open doors to DM 307 or DM 302.

All stories must be written in the Optimist Word Press content management system. Wise students save a copy of stories posted. Students who write stories at home on another computer are required to transfer final copies into their home folder to have access to them during class or lab at a later time.

Anticipated Course Schedule

- Week 1: Business reporting issues, and public and private companies
Class 1: Current business reporting issues
Class 2: Public versus private companies
- Week 2: Business beats, finding basic company information
Class 1: Business beats
Class 2: Internet databases
- Week 3: The SEC, and reading company income statements
Class 1: The Securities and Exchange Commission
Class 2: Reading company income statements
- Week 4: Materially important company events, from changes in management to layoffs
Class 1: Regulation Fair Disclosure
Class 2: Finding news in Form 8-K filings
- Week 5: Executive compensation and company structure
Class 1: Executive compensation
Class 2: The company structure
- Week 6: Funding and growth of larger companies
Class 1: Initial public offerings
Class 2: Mergers and acquisitions
- Week 7: Finding business news in district court and bankruptcy court
Class 1: Your local courts
Class 2: Bankruptcy court
- Week 8: Regulatory agencies of business at the state and federal level
Class 1: State regulation
Class 2: Federal regulation
- Week 9: The economy and how businesses look at it
Class 1: The overall economy
Class 2: The economy and real estate
- Week 10: The stock and bond markets
Class 1: The stock market
Class 2: The bond market
- Week 11: Insider trading and boards of directors
Class 1: Understanding insider trading
Class 2: Boards of directors
- Week 12: Other investors in the market
Class 1: How the market works
Class 2: Mutual funds and hedge funds
- Week 13: Ethics, from source relationships to stock trading
Class 1: The relationship with analysts
Class 2: Business journalism ethics
- Week 14-15: Completion of Project
Final Exam: Presentation of Project
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ACU Mission Statement

The mission of Abilene Christian University is to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world.

College Mission Statement

The College of Arts and Sciences at Abilene Christian University educates students for worldwide Christian service and leadership through programs of study and other learning experiences that blend a liberal arts education with professional and career education.

Department Mission Statement

The mission of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication is to plan, organize and implement an undergraduate and graduate journalism and mass communication teaching program that reflects commitment to the education of an effective graduate who will appreciate the interaction of spiritual, academic, societal and professional values within the context of the university and college missions.

Integration of Faith and Learning

The news professionals of our day voluntarily adhere to various sets of ethical canons. Students in convergence journalism courses are expected to live by these standards in performing newsgathering duties. In addition to these ethical standards, students are expected to live by a higher set of standards – those established by Jesus Christ – while recognizing and protecting the public's right to freedom of information.

JMC Attendance Policy

Value of Attendance

The JMC faculty values attendance at every class session. We believe students with superior attendance perform better than students with average or poor attendance. The teacher may require student to produce documentation of absence causes. Penalties will be imposed for excessive absences unless they are caused by:

- a. Serious illness of the student.
- b. Death or critical illness in immediate family.
- c. Approved university off-campus activities.
- d. Other absolutely unavoidable occurrences.

Penalties

Students whose absences do not meet above criteria may be penalized:

5 MWF absences = minus one letter grade

4 MW or TR absences = minus one letter grade

2 one-day-a-week classes = minus one letter grade

Withdrawals Tied to Absences

When a student's absences reach these levels, including university approved absences, the student will be withdrawn from the class:

- 9 MWF classes,
- or 6 MW or TR classes,
- or 3 one-day-a-week classes, the student will be dropped from the class regardless of the reasons for the absences. The grade will be WP if the absences fit the criteria described under "Value of Attendance." Otherwise the grade will be WF.

University Activity Participation

Under university policy, a student who is required to miss a class to participate in a school activity by the academic administration will not be penalized by the teacher for missing that class ... The student should not be penalized for the absence approved under this policy if he or she has satisfactorily made up the missed work within the time limit and in the way agreed upon by the student and the professor ... [E]ach professor may, but is not required to, drop a student from his or her class for nonattendance (absences in excess of 20 percent of the total meetings of the class) or for disruptive behavior in classrooms...

JMC Make-up Exams

No student can make up more than one exam per course per semester unless exams occur when student has approval to represent ACU off campus.

Instructors Addendum

No student may make up an exam unless permission of the instructor has been granted before the exam.

JMC Academic Integrity Policy

"...Academic integrity is essential to the most effective development of a person's intellectual skills and abilities. Academic dishonesty is not insignificant in its impact on student development. Violations of academic integrity ... involve the intention to deceive or mislead or misrepresent, and therefore are a form of lying (and stealing). ... The most

powerful motive for integrity and truthfulness comes from one's desire to imitate God's nature in our lives ..."

– From ACU Academic Integrity Policy, May 6, 2002, at acu.edu/campusoffices/provost)

Three elements of contemporary journalism and mass communication pose unique integrity challenges for faculty, staff, students and practitioners: (a) the public nature of these functions in society, (b) the absolute necessity to build and maintain credibility and reliability, and (c) the dangers brought on by the ease with which digital data can be stolen, copied, multiplied, manipulated and used to mislead and deceive.

Breakdowns of all forms of academic integrity in JMC classrooms, labs and student media are condemned categorically by the faculty of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication: in group projects, research papers, exams, out-of-class assignments, in-class work, individual projects, lab work, material prepared for public distribution via departmental media, internships, résumés, and in JMC-sponsored organizations.

Students should review the department's Academic Integrity statement and the university's academic integrity policy for specific information about infractions, penalties and appeals processes:

<http://www.acu.edu/academics/cas/jmc/about/policies/integrity.html>

<http://www.acu.edu/academics/provost/documents/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>

ACU Dress Code

Students are encouraged to demonstrate by their dress and appearance a mature Christian attitude and the ability to discern propriety. The university also seeks to prepare students for professional careers where certain standards of dress are required for employment. Part of the educational process, then, is learning to dress appropriately. The following standards and guidelines will assist students in making decisions about their dress and appearance on campus, in class, in Chapel and at all university-sponsored activities, including athletics events.

All students, staff and faculty are expected to dress with Christian appropriateness. Dress should be modest. Some extremes are not acceptable, including halter tops, crop tops/open midriffs and short and/or revealing skirts and shorts.

Body piercing is a growing concern among health care professionals and in some cases is considered by the university as outside the bounds of Christian appropriateness. Extreme, or otherwise distracting or harmful, body piercing is discouraged and will be addressed by Campus Life officials.

During work periods, student workers are expected to conform to the dress code set by the department in which they work.

Shorts may be worn on campus, during classes and in Chapel. However, shorts (and skirts) must be modest and conform to a standard of mid-thigh or longer.

Athletic clothing appropriate to the sport may be worn while participating in athletic classes/activities in designated athletic areas.

Clothing with inappropriate advertising, pictures and/or sayings that are contrary to the mission and Christian standards of ACU are prohibited.

Each faculty member will announce whether men may wear hats during class. Students are asked to remove their caps during times of prayer.

Individual faculty members may have additional dress requirements or preferences concerning appropriate student attire in his or her classroom.

Implementation and enforcement of the dress code are the responsibility of the entire university community. Questions about the interpretation and enforcement of these standards should be directed to the dean of campus life.

Disability Statement

Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodations for any recognized disability must submit requests in writing to the instructor by the end of the second week of the semester. This documentation must come in writing from ACU's Alpha Academic Services, which can be contacted at 2667. The ability to consistently meet deadlines is an essential requirement of most media and media related professions. Thus, in JMC courses subsequent to this one where meeting deadlines is an inherent element of instruction, extended time for some types of testing or other assignments may not always be an option.

Racial, Sexual Harassment Statement

Racial and sexual harassment is a violation of the code of conduct as described in Section 2-02 of the ACU Student Guide and will not be tolerated during class or class-related activities. Harassment is any action, including a joke or suggestion, that creates an intimidating, hostile or degrading environment and would have such an effect on a reasonable person of the alleged victim's status. Violations of this section will be referred to Campus Life.

Diversity Perspective

Those who control the flow of images in the mass media have a responsibility to their audience to illustrate messages in a fair and truthful manner, without bias or prejudice, and with careful consideration to creating imagery that does not reinforce societal stereotypes.