Overview

This course teaches cultural journalists the essentials of news reporting: the skills and conventions of journalistic practice across media platforms. Whether your reported work is published, posted or broadcast, you'll need to work from the same ground rules as your editors, producers, sources and readers, and to master a repertoire of basic forms.

This semester we will tackle two of those forms: the news report and the feature, and producing pieces for print, web and radio/podcast. As you do this, we will test and question the conventional practices of reporters and editors, and examine how those practices are changing as journalism moves in new directions.

Reporting is learned through practice. In addition to reading news stories and learning the fundamental writing conventions of news reporting, you'll be asked to go out on the street to bring back your own stories.

This course will teach you the aggressive reporting skills to break through the prevailing narratives—whether those are packaged up by public relations representatives and official spokespersons or perpetuated by your own colleagues. You will learn how to develop sources and use them to get reliable and meaningful information.

You will also get a handle on news judgment—not just deciding what stories are worth covering, but making careful decisions about what details to focus on in a story and what to leave out. We'll integrate reporting and analysis, ensuring that each reinforces the other to maximum effect.

You'll learn to synthesize complex information into clear, concise, compelling and accurate articles.

For the radio piece, you will learn to tell a story through sound, and to develop a narrative arc in a brief window.

You will come out of this course with the ability to produce stories that change how your readers look at and act in the world. By the end of the semester, you'll know
how to:

- figure out what's newsworthy, for different audiences and outlets
- develop and interview sources
- write coherent, high-impact news stories and features
- produce a radio/podcast piece and incorporate it into a multimedia presentation
- use documentation and public records
- practice journalism ethically
- understand how editorial decisions get made at news organizations
- use newsgathering in cultural reporting and criticism

The course will also help you begin to navigate the journalism marketplace. Getting a byline isn’t hard. Maintaining high standards for the work that appears under your name, even in instances when paying outlets don’t share that objective, will likely prove to be the greater challenge.

Readings

The following books are required:

- *The Journalist and the Murderer*, by Janet Malcolm
- *Ghettoside*, by Jill Leovy (Oct. 27)
- *Associated Press Stylebook*

There is also a course packet for this class, which includes most other class readings. Additional assignment materials, audio files and documentation examples will be posted on our Slack (under “Course Materials”) and/or distributed in class.

Guest Speakers

Throughout the semester, guests from a range of publications and outlets will speak to the class. This will be an opportunity to learn from their experiences and pose questions about the current media environment.

**Finally,** this syllabus is a living document so any changes to it will be available immediately in Course Materials and be updated on our Slack.

Class structure

Each class session will be divided into two segments. The first part will consist of a seminar session on a building block of journalistic practice. You will spend the remaining class time working on stories both in and out of class, and in one-on-one editorial meetings.

Editorial meetings are an essential component of the class. Each student is expected to have a minimum of three meetings with the instructor.

Three class sessions will focus on audio writing and production with Gretta Cohn, a senior producer at Midroll Media, and a former producer at WNYC where she worked on
Assignments
You will build basic journalistic skills through a series of short assignments:
• A reaction story on Primary Day (500 words)
• A news piece based on a press conference/event (500 words)
• An explainer (650 words)
• A news story on a controversy (650 words)

We will then focus on two in-depth projects:
• A 3-minute podcast about a subject’s job
• A news-driven feature on a trend (1,500 - 2,000 words)

Grades
Attendance and regular in-class participation are both mandatory, and will count for one-fourth of your grade. Writing assignments, which will account for the rest of the grade, will be evaluated for accuracy, use of language, and adherence to fundamental principles of fair reporting.

What the grades mean:
A = Professional quality; ready to show to an editor
B = On the right track but still missing a fundamental element; needs additional work
C and below = A serious liability stands between you and a publishable story; fixing will require a shift in approach or concept

Accuracy, Plagiarism and Fabrication
Accuracy is critical in journalism. You need to get the story first, and you need to get it right. You must check and recheck every fact in your reporting—including the spelling of names. Writing assignments containing gross inaccuracies will receive an F.

Plagiarizing means stealing a quote or sections of a text from someone else’s work (published or otherwise) without crediting the original source. In other words, when you claim someone else’s words or ideas as your own, you plagiarize.

You will fail this course on the spot if you plagiarize, invent sources or doctor quotes.

In general, you should familiarize yourself with the school’s Ethics Handbook.

Deadlines
As is the case in any newsroom, deadlines must be met. Late assignments will be penalized. Every assignment should be submitted on Google Classroom by deadline.
Attendance & Tardiness
Class attendance is critical. Missing a class will result in an F for the day. Missing more than two classes during the semester will result in a drop of your final grade by one letter grade. Punctuality is also required. Repeated lateness for class will have a negative impact on your grade.

Format for writing assignments
For the sake of consistency, every newsroom adheres to a particular writing style. You are expected to use AP style for all assignments.

In addition, please use the following format for every assignment:

• Type a story slug (one word that makes clear the topic of your story), your name, the date and the page number (SLUG—YOUR NAME—DATE—PAGE NUMBER) on the top left corner of each page.
• Below the slug line, type the word count of your story (Word count: 500).
• Double-space
• Type -30- at the end of the story.

For every reporting assignment, you must also submit a list of all of your sources and their contact information (phone numbers, and email addresses where available). For documents, list the name of the organization that published the document and that organization’s contact information or Web address. For news stories used for background, list the article name, the publication, the author’s name and the publication date.

In addition, please list two new story ideas at the end of each assignment.
[NOTE: This syllabus is subject to change. If you miss a class, check with me or a classmate for missed work and assignments.]

Readings for first class:
* “Reporting,” a chapter from Samuel G. Freedman’s Letters to a Young Journalist
* Society of Professional Journalists’ “Code of Ethics”
* “For Journalists Cover Trump, A Murrow Moment,” CJR Online

September 9: What is news, and what is it for?

* What news is and who decides what is newsworthy; The culture and values of the newsroom; the evolution of news writing as a form; the convention of objectivity; the emerging ethos of "fair;" basic tools and techniques; how to report a reaction story

Assignments:
* Primary Day reaction story. Primary on Sept. 13; bring reporting notes to class on September 16
* Bring in an Election Day or Primary Day story from any news source that you thought was effective and well done and be prepared to explain why
* Begin looking for controversy story ideas

Readings
* The Inverted Pyramid, from Telling the Story, the Missouri Group
* “In Their Own Words,” on quoting and attribution from News Reporting and Writing, the Missouri Group
* "The Lexicon of Leads,” by Jack Hart, editor, The Oregonian
* “Gallery of ASNE Award-Winning Leads,” by Chip Scanlan

September 16: The basics – putting the story together and being fair

* The elements of a news story; writing a lede; quotes and attribution basics; beginning to build story judgment (review AP day schedule, pick event, justify choice)

In-class writing
* Primary Day reaction story

Assignments
* Cover an AP day book event. File a 500-word story by Wed., Sept. 21, at noon.
Readings
* “Interviewing,” from News Reporting and Writing for Today's Media
* “Explainer” samples, to be distributed in class

September 23: Developing story ideas and interviewing

* News judgment; story development; where to get ideas; the pr machine: when/what to embrace, when to avoid; “Explainer” stories -- What makes them work? How are the ideas selected and why? Identifying sources; preparing for the interview; balancing points of view; what questions to always ask; quotes and attribution part II

In-class writing

Assignments
* Second draft of AP day book story, due Wed., Sept. 28, noon
* A pitch for your controversy story idea(s) is due Wed., Sept. 28, noon. Please outline your pitch on the story idea worksheet provided
* Come to class prepared to pitch your “explainer” story idea. Please outline your pitch on the story idea worksheet

Readings
* “Civil Cases,” from News Reporting and Writing
* Freedom of Information Act sample request

September 30: Research techniques and pitching stories

NOTE: We will meet at our class at 9 a.m., then move to Bobst library, PC Lab 2, at 11:00.

* Using databases (Lexis/Nexis, ProQuest, Factiva); backgrounding; using previously published work; identifying stories within published work; litigation and criminal records; property and business records; freedom of information laws; how the courts work; how to write a query; how to pre-report; approaching editors

Guest speaker: NYU journalism librarian Katy Boss

In class: Pitch your explainers. We’ll circulate the story ideas and discuss as a group. Discussion of court cases, readings, and how to write a pitch letter. Discussion of FOIA/FOIL, online resources like iFOIA and MuckRock, preparation of a FOIA and
appeal.

Assignments
* Explainer due Wed., Oct. 5, noon
* Controversy written pitches due Oct. 5, noon.

Readings
* “Reporting with Numbers,” from *Telling the Story*, the Missouri Group

October 7: Developing human sources and interpreting data

* Identifying access opportunities; finding shared interest; creating a two-way relationship; what can you offer besides publicity?; avoiding ax-grinders; on/off record; an introduction to data visualization

**In class:** Discussion of readings. Data visualization presentation and exercise. Group edit of explainers, group pitch of controversy stories.

Assignments
* Explainer rewrite due Oct. 12.

October 14: Interview with a newsmaker

* Interview workshop with a newsmaker. Guest speaker to be announced.

**In class:** Press conference, writing exercise after press conference. Work on controversy stories in class.

Assignments
* Controversy story due Wed., Oct. 19, noon

October 21: Radio session I

* Reporting with sound; meet your equipment; choosing and capturing a subject
Assignments
* Record subject, bring file(s) to class

October 28: Radio session II

* Intro to ProTools; assemble sequence; begin writing script

In-class writing: script development

* Radio edit clinic (to be scheduled): Gretta will set up time for students to drop-in and get help editing their pieces.

Assignments
* Controversy rewrite due Wed., Nov. 2, noon
* Record your voice track and bring all files to class on Nov. 4
* Come to class on Nov. 4 prepared to pitch your trend story via pitch letter. Your pitch should be written in a query letter addressed to an editor at a publication appropriate for your story

Readings
* “An Unbelievable Story of Rape,” Ken Armstrong T. Christian Miller, The Marshall Project and Propublica; also, listen to Longform podcast on reporting process and “Anatomy of Doubt” This American Life
* “Learning to Speak Lingerie” Peter Hessler, The New Yorker
* The Journalist and the Murderer, Janet Malcolm

November 4: Feature reporting and writing

* Structuring the feature; dissection of readings; finding your work process; how to organize your research and manage your time

In-class: Pitch trend stories via pitch letter. Class discussion, followed by individual meetings.

Assignments
* Trend stories due Monday, Nov. 16, noon.

November 11: Radio session III
* Assemble and polish segment, including voice track; listening session; how to put podcast skills to work

Readings
* Select articles by Guest Speaker (to be announced)

November 18: Feature reporting and writing II

Guest speaker

In class: Individual meetings about trend stories.

Readings
* “The Case for Reparations” Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic*
* “Consider the Lobster,” David Foster Wallace, *Gourmet*

NO CLASS NOVEMBER 24: THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 2: Where reporter meets commentator

* Writing reported pieces with a point of view; where and how to bring in personal opinions; building an argument on a foundation of fact; staking out idea turf; review drafts; summarize the story; find the focus; identify where to dig deeper, and how to get there; identify and cut off dead ends

In class: Discussion of readings; group discussion of trend stories. Individual meetings about trend stories.

Readings
* AP Stylebook: Briefing on Media Law
* “Let Us Now Appraise Famous Writers,” Jessica Mitford, *Atlantic*
* “A Rape on Campus,” Sabrina Rubin Erderly, *Rolling Stone*

December 9: Ethics, Libel and Journalistic Flameouts

* Media ethics – the golden rules; media law – libel, privacy; good practices; social media and its uses/abuses, reporting and editing catastrophes

In class: Discussion of readings, editing workshop for trend stories.
Assignments
* Final draft of trend story due Wed., Dec. 14, noon

Readings
● “Seven Years as a Freelance Writer, or, How to Make Vitamin Soup,” Richard Morgan
● Ghettoside, Jill Leovy

December 16: The Job

Discussion of readings.