Course Overview

Welcome to Writing Research Reporting I. In this class, you will learn traditional news story structure, reporting techniques and basic writing skills. But you’re also going to learn how to break the mold.

Audience engagement will be the backbone of this course. At the beginning of the semester, you will pick a community “partner” that you will involve at every stage of the story cycle, for the duration of the course. You will learn both community research and fundamental journalism techniques, while constantly turning to your community for feedback, story ideas and input.

Readings

Most of our readings will be online, and I'll give them to you the week before they’re due. Please study them — make notes, highlight interesting passages, write questions. We will often use these to anchor discussions in class.

There is one text book I would like you to get, and it is very cheap on Amazon. Please let me know if you have trouble getting ahold of it.

Assignments

You should frequently engage with your community and log your interactions with this form. Each week, we'll check in on the leaderboard. At the end of the semester, the winner will get a TBD prize.

You’re also required to produce at least two pieces of content, crafted and distributed in a way that works for your community. This could be anything from a Snapchat story covering an offline event, to a custom resource guide that you publish on Medium. Since the community partners are all different, your content will be unique from your classmates’. There is no set due date for these two pieces of content. When you have your idea, you will pitch it in class, and we’ll set a deadline together.
In addition to these two pieces of content, everyone will have the same three big assignments. We’ll go over each in more detail in class.

1. **Engagement strategy memo:** A short report on who your community is, and how you plan to reach and engage with them.

2. **Influencer profile:** A traditional, written profile of an influencer in your community. Researching your engagement memo will help you identify your subject.

3. **Final product:** This is an example of a final product. Here is another. Remember that the content you produce throughout the semester can be a part of your final product.

These three assignments have set due dates outlined below, and are due by 9 A.M. on the designated date. I may add to, or tweak, all assignments, as I see necessary.

Finally, please subscribe to the Crowd Powered News Network on [Medium](https://medium.com), sign up for their [Google Group](https://groups.google.com) and create a saved Twitter search for #socialj and #CPNN. We’ll spend a little time each class discussing interesting conversations or projects that bubble up through these communities.

**The Schedule**

Since so much of this course is about being responsive to your community, we don’t have a week by week syllabus. Instead, I’ve divided the semester into three, five-week units. Important dates that fall within that unit are listed below, and I’ll give you updates in class on upcoming topics we’ll be covering.

Each class, you should be prepared to talk about what went on with your community the week before — what did you observe? What did you learn? What did you do? Do you have any obstacles that your classmates and I can help you think through?

**Part 1: Community research, listening and gaining trust**

In the first third of the semester, we’ll define what we mean by “engagement,” and you’ll get to know your community partner. Drawing from product development and design think, you’ll learn how to do community research, and use what you learn to craft a basic content and engagement strategy.

We’ll also start to review the basics of journalistic writing and reporting: things like news judgement, nut grafs, gaining trust and generating story ideas. We’ll also be reading and analyzing profiles, to inspire your own influencer profile.
September 14th: Draft of engagement strategy memo due.

September 21 - Final engagement strategy memo due. You should also, by this point, be working on setting up interviews for your influencer profiles.

October 5th - Draft of influencer profile due

*Part 2: Advanced engagement, distributed publishing
The next part of the semester, you’ll continue to learn engagement and reporting techniques, as well as storytelling for the web. We’ll dive deeper into objectivity, crowdsourcing, participation incentives, guiding and participating in civil online discussions, social newsgathering and storytelling on different platforms.

October 12th - Influencer profile due. By now, you should also be thinking about what your final product will be.

October 19th - Final product ideas due, by email, to me. I’ll give you individual feedback, and help you brainstorm logistics.

*Part 3: Analytics, feedback loops

November 16th - Final product progress reports. Be prepared to talk for 5-10 minutes about how your final product is going.

December 7th - First half of final product presentations

December 14th - Second half of final product presentations

Housekeeping

*Please bring a pen and notebook to each class, because we will usually have a lids down policy. When I’m lecturing, your computer should be shut. When a classmate is presenting, your computer should be shut. When we have a guest, your computer should definitely be shut. Do not fiddle with your phone.

*Remember, this is your class as much as your class. If you have an idea, or want to do something a little different, come talk to me about it!