Brooke Kroeger  
THE SYLLABUS

Writing, Research, Reporting Workshop II  
JOUR – GA.1022.001  
NYU Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute  
Global and Joint Program Studies

Prof. Brooke Kroeger  
e-mail: brooke.kroeger@nyu.edu

The Concept

In WRR I, your focus was news reporting, “the backbone of every type of journalism,” to quote Professor Borst. You spent a good deal of time on the basics – on research methods, sourcing, interview technique, note-taking, story organization, grammar, style and deadlines, tapping the resources of this great city all the while. The downbeat was accurate and evocative reporting, solid research and reporting and lively, well-organized stories. Ethics, cultural awareness, news judgment, analytical skills development and other reporting considerations especially important in the global sphere figured heavily, as did your introduction to multimedia skills.

Over the summer, you did your thesis fieldwork and have likely returned with hours and hours of transcription yet to do and an idea forming in your head of how you might approach this capstone work of the program.

In WRR II, we’ll have two alternating drumbeats meant to deepen, amplify, and enhance what you’ve already learned and to further develop the skills you will need as working professionals. There will be more work on all of the above plus a new heavy emphasis on voice and originality, keen analysis, descriptive acuity, long-form structure, and exquisite narrative technique and voice in both shorter turnaround and longer deadline assignments.

The “workshop” period for both Section I and II of this class are a full two hours long. In between, we meet all together for an hour that will be used in various ways throughout the term. For three weeks, we have Professor Solomon for a short-course in First Amendment Law for the readings will be posted. Two field trips are planned: One to NYC Records, before which you will need to have your “A Lot About a Plot” building picked so you can get the all-important information docket on the lot number which the librarians will prepare for you. And another to the NY Historical Society, so that you can gain familiarity with its multitude of documentary material about NY history. Some of these resources now exist online (e.g. 19th and early
20th century city directories) but are way, way, way easier to access on paper. In both places, the librarians are extremely knowledgable.

What’s the work load? Lots of reading, Beat Notes every week, and five major assignments, one of which is to get as far as possible on your thesis. All burners are on and all pots boil all the time.

I want to be very clear about this so I’m going to say it more than once: Deadlines matter absolutely in the profession, especially in the current 24/7 news environment, so they matter here. I will not cut slack. The time I set aside to edit the work of your class is the time there is. I do very extensive line-edits and often will work with you on a piece one-on-one if I think the extra effort is required and you want it. Late assignments, I do not edit, and the A you start the class with begins its downward slide.

We will work in themes rather than physical beats. This is our conceit, except for “A Lot About a Plot”: We are foreign correspondents based in New York City who cover the city not for the city or to dissect larger issues of international importance, but we cover for other locales. That could mean as a national reporter writing for a diffuse general audience, or as a reporter for a publication in another country or for an international outlet. To me, it’s the most basic notion of foreign corresponding: making the place you are reporting from come alive in a truthful, factual, engaging way for those who cannot be there or do not know it or understand its issues and underpinnings; or, exploding an issue of international interest or importance for audiences beyond your physical location.

In addition—this is another fine means of developing your skills-- we will spend time analyzing the efforts of seasoned professionals as well as each other’s efforts – sometimes in class (but never more than two a day) and sometimes in one-on-one conferences with me or with each other. Those one-on-one conferences, however, can only happen when the work is ready for or requires that treatment. Always have work to show me at least a day before we meet so I have time (among my other obligations) to assess it and figure out what it needs.

We will aim to get very smart about doing superb preliminary research, the kind that takes you way beyond Google, the kind I hope you will learn to value highly if you don’t already.

As to what we'd like to see completed on your masters’ projects: Our minimum aim is a “top” (the first 10-15 paragraphs) and what I call “The 4x4 25/250,” a complete plan of attack. Some of you may find you need further reporting after your summer fieldwork so that you can get to the finish line. Some of you may be planning return trips to your thesis locales over Thanksgiving or Winter or even Spring break. That’s fine. This process will make it abundantly clear if that is needed. Some of you will be able to continue reporting virtually and may do so
well into March/early April. All that considered, our goal can also be a reasonably complete first
draft by Fall term’s end. We’ve even had completion in January a number of times now and
publication by February. The Migration team of 2015-15 picked off large chunks of their thesis
work in October for Global Post and Mashable. So all is possible and I will help you, of course.

What I'm saying is, if you find your subject shelf life is shorter than you planned, why stretch
this agonizing work out till April as your reporting gets colder and colder? I don’t say this to
pressure you. If your idea is strong enough, a well-reported, well-written piece will hold up.
Even so, why not get on with it if you can?

**Deadlines, Term schedule and chart**
You will need to pay very close attention to the schedule, which is updated constantly and is on
our calendar here:

[https://basecamp.com/1950558/calendars/1497429/calendar_events](https://basecamp.com/1950558/calendars/1497429/calendar_events)

My best advice is this: Never wait until the last minute to do your work, never save just one day
(that can end up in canceled interviews or bedridden with the flu) and don’t get behind. In this
class, noticeable effort, steady improvement, and deadlines, as already noted, matter absolutely.
Waiting until the last minute means sketchy research, compounded difficulty in both reaching
and landing as many potential sources as possible, little time for in-person reporting (the kind
that reaps the best source for strong descriptive elements, which we are often looking for this
term), and little or no time for thoughtful rewriting, which is key to the best work. In those cases,
the more rewrites you submit your work to before we all see it, the better it will be when we do. I
reserve the right to assign a couple of “spot,” or, very quick turnaround assignments. In these, I
will be looking for steady improvement in your ability to handle them. If I find you do them well
the first time, I'll drop doing it again. It’s another skill you need: (As I used to think in my wire
service days in such situations: If I had sixty days, I know what I would do; but I have sixty
minutes, so I know what I am going to do.)

That is to say, "report-out" all your stories fully, but also know that the ability to budget the time
available and produce what is expected of you on deadline is an important skill in itself. So is the
wisdom to attack a subject in the way that you can bring off in the amount of time allotted. For
quick turnaround work, speed, acuity, accuracy, and an ability to identify what’s important to
relate in so few words, will matter most. These are also skills you are likely to need along the
way.

Balance that with the other huge value: pick a subject of substance in every case. Always think in
terms of adding value to the sum of human knowledge, as one of my beloved Norwegian
colleagues used to say.
Again, rewrite, rewrite, rewrite is one of the most important lessons of this course. An assigned rewrite is as important as the original assignment and if new reporting and structuring is called for, I expect you to invest in doing it. If no rewrite is necessary, I won't assign one. An excellent rewrite (which means re-reporting and re-writing) will replace the original grade. A mediocre one (one that just inserts my corrections without real additional effort) will be of less value to you, numeric or otherwise.

Baseline Expectation
It goes without saying that no form of plagiarism, cheating of any kind, or appropriation without attribution will be tolerated. It is grounds for failure.

The Basecamp Site and Slack
You are all accustomed to Basecamp (http://basecamp.com/1950558) from our GloJo site. For class, we use it a bit differently. By Thursday morning, I will post the next week’s assignment, links to or pdfs of the readers, and a space for members of each Section to post their Beat Notes (put them in the right slot, please) and, on deadline days, their drafts. All of us are urged to post items of common interest under the heading “MEDIA DIET” – what you’ve read during that day or during the week that you’d like to bring to our common attention, including anything you publish so I, in turn, can blast it on Facebook. Don’t be shy. The calendar also will carry this information in shortform.

Slack
To help us not clutter up the Basecamp site, let’s use Slack for our informal chats – (e.g. “Can you say a bit more about what you mean by a “storyette”?) Slack also provides for private one-on-one conversations or notes to the whole group. Many of you are using it at your internships or jobs. I like it. We’ll set up a site Day One as we set the term deadlines.

Beat Notes
Every single week, the night before class, I want a report on your reporting and impressions that you post to the whole group. This allows us to keep up with each other’s reporting progress, to see where issues are developing, and to be able to address these in class or in our comments to each other (encouraged!) on the site. I think you’ll find that this ability to communicate with each other regularly ahead of class days saves an enormous amount of time that we can put to richer use. Its subtle accountability function will also keep you focused on the work ahead.

Beat Notes serve as a journal for you (about your research and reporting adventures and issues, the ones that often don’t get into the piece) and will give all of us an informal way to keep track of your pitfalls and progress. It’s also a way I will use to encourage (read: force) you to stretch, to experiment with various writing devices and rigors. You’ll see. When we are editing
collaboratively, I move to Google Drive which offers more editing and commenting options. Again, we will all see everyone's work as we post.

**Spot Assignments, Deep-dive Research, Longer-deadline Assignments, the Thesis**

At least once, and more if I see the need, we will experiment with a **spot assignment**, a quick turnaround piece on deadline in the style of the daily or weekly reporter. This will be executed during no more than a 24-hour period or less. This is to ready you for this kind of work should you ever find yourself in the position of having to do it. Longer form assignments, as noted, are likely to call for rewrites, perhaps more than one rewrite. I expect your strongest effort first try, and if no rewrite is necessary, I won’t require one. But everyone gets a second shot.

The **deep-dive research project** is designed to get you thinking like a literary detective and to know how to avail yourself of the gargantuan world of information and facts out there, either still buried in archives far from the Internet or retrievable with sophistication (and access to a great university’s amazing digital library resources) from the ether.

I’ll expect you to be chipping away at the research, reporting and writing for all of your more formal **longer-deadline assignments** outside of class time, all term, until their due dates. And we’ll be checking in with each other about these projects every week. Again, whatever you do, again, don’t get behind.

As for the **thesis**, we’ll go step-by-step to get you to or near the finish line. Each of you will present a draft for us to critique in the second half of the term.

**General Expectations**

**Attendance**

I expect your thoughtful, daily participation in class and I expect you to be there each week, on time, and fully prepared. I mean this. You all know me as Mother Maternal, but this is my other persona: The Exacting Pedagogue Who Wants the Most from You to Prepare You for the Real World. I generally will need a doctor’s note to excuse an absence and I need an email **well** ahead of class, not after, or during, informing me that you will be absent and why. To be absent twice is dire. With three – that’s nearly a quarter of the term-- it’s not possible to pass.

**The Assignments**

I expect every assignment to reflect your finest effort and be submitted by deadline. In fairness to those who get their work in on time, lateness will bear a penalty in grading as noted. More significantly, I do not line-edit late work. I will let you know if a rewrite is needed and in a very general way, why. But that’s all. Here is my reason: Part of helping the class to progress as a group is my being able to identify common issues, which I can only do by you producing and my
editing all the pieces in the same short timeframes. My pledge is to turn your work around almost instantly and get it back to you very quickly, so that you can build on it as you work on the next assignment. The other issue, as noted above, is available time to do this well, which you deserve.

Reading

I will look for your thoughtful reflection on the best (and perhaps even the worst) journalism of the preceding week in the publications that we are following. I hope you will make suggestions to the class for the week’s best reads. The place for that is on Basecamp, called MEDIA DIET. For the first few weeks, we will engage with some classics and some pieces from the late summer, but after that, we’ll work with what is more current and I hope the suggestions will come from you.

Skills Development

We will spend time reviewing the fundamentals of a good story -- idea formulation, research and reporting, sourcing, interviewing, ethics, structure and style. We’ll tackle a different basic element every week, often tied to our reporting and writing assignments. We will learn about the various types of stories and what is involved in effective presentation of each. We will work to become ace researchers. We will also work commonly during class time in applying what we learn. The overriding idea is to combine theory and practice with creative individual and collaborative effort.

Multimedia

I’m expecting that your skill set is developed enough so that we don’t have to work on fundamentals. You know that Adrian and James and Michael are at your disposal. Do think in terms of illustrating your work and submitting same with the assignment (though this is not required beyond stills) and if you’d like to produce one of the assignments as an audio or video piece, I’m open to that, but let’s make that part of a mutually agreed plan.

Thesis workshops

By early October, every third week will be a thesis workshop for two of you.

Texts

No texts, per se, since you will be doing a lot of textual analysis and will read a book or two as well, I hope. We will mostly work with the most interesting published work of the week, plus some special favorites. As noted, we’ll put our attention on the New York Times, New
Yorker, Atlantic, Harpers and the like. You need a digital subscription to the Times and should be regular readers of the other listed publications, which we will be mining. The magazines are available (a month late) via NYU Proquest and often the pieces appear online, in toto, as well.

The following are books good to have on your reference shelf:

Blundell, William E. The Art and Craft of Feature Writing;

Strunk, William and E.B. White, Elements of Style;

Funk, McMahan and Day. Elements of Grammar for Writers;


**Blood, Sweat, Rewrite, and the Mean Edit**

In this class, you will revel in the joys of solid research and solid rewrite. My goal is to make sure you leave here a believer in both. Learn to love getting lost in the library. Learn to love the sound of your own voice reading your own prose aloud. Learn to listen for clunkers, misplaced modifiers, clauses and other grammatical errors. Learn not to make the same mistakes twice. (Okay, three times.) Learn to labor over every sentence, every word. Never show me less than the best you can do within the time allotted unless I specify that I'm looking for a very rough draft. I will edit you hard -- the "fishnet" edit, as Charles Dickens used to call it in his magazine-editing days. (Think of it as an act of love.) Reading through the edits of each other’s stories carefully will help you avoid similar mistakes in your own work and push us along that much faster in our quest. So we will be serious about investing in each other’s work.

**Grading**

15% Attendance, Met Deadlines, Reading/Classroom Assignments, Participation
15% Scene-setter
15% Controversy
15% Soapbox
20% Deep-dive
20% Thesis top and outline
It would be my strong preference not to grade but it is a university requirement, so I must. Please be aware that in the Faculty of Arts and Science, the lowest acceptable final grade is a B. A B-minus or lower in this or any other course puts your degree progress in jeopardy.

My undergrads created this meme last year. Not my words but surely could have been. Nota bene.

More Notes on the Major Assignments

THE SCENE-SETTER/CURTAIN RAISER 1200-1500 words

This will be a scene-setter or curtain-raiser pegged to run (pitch it now) BEFORE the UN General Assembly gets underway. You already know all about it, and have for months, so I am expecting a lot. 1200-1500 words max. I had to write one as I got hired at Newsday on a couple of days-notice a million years ago. Yes, I had just come from eight years of experience in EURMEDAF, but didn’t know anything about the UN. Mine was general about the opening of the GA – so I could get my mind around it, too. Yours can be some obscure offshoot, using the GA as an excuse to talk about a little known or understood topic. You can do this.
UN Readies For 39th Opening

- Unique assembly is much maligned
- Reagan’s message to Gromyko: flexibility

THE SOAPBOX 600-900 words maximum

This is a 900-word maximum point of view piece on any subject of your choosing (and your big chance to use what Fannie Hurst called [always attribute!] “the perpendicular pronoun.”) We are working on voice but I would also like this to bear the hallmarks of reporting. Here’s one I did a million years ago that was originally 1800 words and drained, squeezed and cut down to half:


THE CONTROVERSY OR EXPLAINER 1800 words or fewer
Pick a controversy of international significance and explain it to us in 1800 words or less. It must involve significant original reporting along with any attributed material. This is not an opinion piece. Save that for the Soapbox. Help us understand an issue in all its permutations. This can be related to the election but only if you turn it in by October 4, so there is time to pitch it. Otherwise, too late.

**THE DEEP DIVE 2000-3000 words**

A final, reported piece examining in exquisite detail a piece of real estate going back to its original state in one of these neighborhoods: **Lower East Side, East Village, NoHo, Bushwick, Greenpoint, Williamsburg or of interest to those interested in same.** We are doing these with the aim of publication in *Bedford + Bowery*, which last year’s class and the class before did very successfully. Pick buildings/locations other than those already written about. To help avoid duplication, you might peg yours to ethnic establishments that allow you to use your language skills!

Look through all of these:


- Dan Pleck “Umbrella House”
- Mariam Elba firehouse turned public tv studio at Lafayette and White
- Carmen Cuesta Roca: Orpheum Theater

- Nicki Fleischner “Met Pool”

- Camila Osorio the Ikea site in Red Hook

- Jesse Coburn: Confucius Plaza

- Alex Hall: Essex Street Market

- Kat Thornton: Drom

- MireiaTriguero-Roura: 160 Bleecker

- Katie Whittaker: Nick’s Tavern

- Chris Looft: Blue and Gold’s Building
Bailey Wolff: Herring Fishing Club
Alex Kane: Walhalla Hall
Deganit Perez: Father’s Heart Ministries
Dusty Christensen: Academy of Music
Kate Drew: Clinton Hall
Zehra Rehman: Veselka
Ilaria Parogni: 156 Second Avenue
Nadeen Shaker: 7th Street Squat
Tom Brant: Merchants House

Look through these from December-January 2014-15:
http://bedfordandbowery.com/category/a-lot-about-a-plot/
The Forward Building
First Houses
Liz Christy Community Garden
Cooper Square Houses
Fontana’s Was a Police Station
Knickerbocker Village
The Public Theater was the Public Library
Rocket Factory Lofts
295 East 8th St was a home for homeless boys
Amato Opera House
White House Hotel for Transients
Baruch Houses
62 East 4th Street
La MaMa
Ludlow Street Jail/HighSchool
177 Bleecker Street - Dr. Strange's haunts
St. John the Baptist Church in Bed-Stuy
Greenpoint's Onion Dome Russian Orthodox Cathedral

And these from the December-January 2013-14
Your Thesis:

We will get you to a top and full outline if not a completed first draft by term's end, doing workshops of various kinds every third week of the term. As Beatnotes, every third week, I'll want a "Storyette" from your thesis research, to get those writing muscles moving.

* * *

Assignment One:

Our basic theme is expressed in a piece I wrote ages and ages ago that Newsday headlined, “Time Again for So Much UNery”

I wrote it a week after I joined the paper with, okay, eight years of experience in the Middle East and Europe but no UN experience whatsoever and no contacts. So you can do this. Help us understand what’s up this year, what’s at stake or not, what do diplomats expect and so on. If you want to pitch it, write it to the publication’s specs and pitch it right away (to some venue that doesn’t have a correspondent on site.) You can do this as a general overview or with special attention to an area of your specific interest or more expeditiously, to where you have the best contacts that will yield strong original reporting.
Assignment Two: Soapbox

We will study a variety of short first-person columns to get a good sense of what works well. We'll consider what makes a piece of work both newsworthy and publishable. We will study the "point of view" format and then we will write and write and rewrite until we produce pristine columns that are reported, but that also can employ the first person. 600-900 words maximum.

Assignment Three: Controversy or Explainer

Take a subject of controversy -- anything that engages you with an international angle -- and find a fresh way to approach it. That means studying what's already been written about it lately and then finding a new way into it through sources you develop as well as the approach your writing takes. Again, not first person. This could be through a profile of one of the major players (or spoilers), or through a new movement or idea that is gaining ground. [Here's an example: An op-ed page piece by the president of Teachers College at Columbia advocates tailoring all education to individual needs and changing the way we talk about "learning disabilities" to talking about "learning differences" because our move away from an industrial economy demands it]. You do this with thorough background and by presenting and assessing the opinions of some new and seasoned thinkers -- and don't forget their detractors. 1800 words maximum.

Assignment Four: Deep Research Dive

"Deep Documentary Research Dive." 2000-2500 words
Pick a location in the East Village, Lower East Side, NoHo, Bushwick, Williamsburg or Greenpoint and research its history all the way back to when it was an open field, amassing anything and everything you can learn about it along the way. Tax and Real Estate Records. News reports. Controversies. Crimes. Find a place that will make this a marvelous read or a series of marvelous vignettes. Provide with your piece all your amassed documentation, interviews, and other source material. Use municipal, real estate and census records, court records, newspaper archives, historical societies and library manuscript collections if and as relevant. This is a semester-long effort that you should commence work on now. DO NOT WAIT to get this underway or your regret will be deep, very deep.

Thesis

Every third week we'll be checking in with specific deadlines on your masters project, moving you to a top and completed outline at least by term's end. Each of you must present an early draft
of at least the top for us to critique (1200-1500 words), due the week before your presentation so we have time to digest what you provide. And every third week in your Beat Notes, I'll be asking for "Storyettes" from your research.

Schedule and Deadlines

Other that what I’ve already posted on the Calendar, we will do this together to insure your investment in the dates.