This is a generic version of the actual syllabus available the first day of class or shortly before.

The Beat

Spring 2009

Professor Frankie Edozien

Room 633

212-992-7955

edozien@nyu.edu

Office hours: Tuesdays 1-3 p.m., and by appointment.

Description

Welcome.

All semester long we will cover New York City from Riverdale to Far Rockaway. It’s government, its budgets, its elections its restaurants, courts, neighborhoods, healthcare, all are part of our portfolio.

From Day 1, we are metro reporters who will hone our craft covering the biggest and most vibrant municipality in the nation. You will learn to research report and write authoritatively on New York City and all its problems and issues.

This is not a lecture class per se, so you will be out covering stories all over the Big Apple and then bringing them back to write on deadline. I will stress the news feature which will require a good amount of reporting before a piece is turned in but don’t be surprised if you are asked to go cover something on our beat on deadline.

You will sharpen your interviewing techniques and learn to follow up breaking news with insightful analytical pieces to go to the heart of the issue. You will develop a keen eye for detail and your copy must reflect the details of each piece so readers are transported to the scene through your writing.
To be an effective metro reporter you must be a local news junkie, so scouring the big dailies is a must for this class, hence the New York Times, New York Daily News and the New York Post are must-reads before class. In addition to the free papers like AM New York and Metro.

Each week, a selection of students will be asked to dissect the major metro stories if the week and see what was missing and how we in our newsroom would cover it. Everyone must participate regardless of who is leading the conversation.

You will have three beat stories of 700-900 words and a final project of 1,200 words. There could be two more, shorter pieces sprinkled in. Each piece must have original reporting: quotes from at least two sources and your own observation. It must also have research and color. Rewrites are inevitable and are a part of the process. If I ask for a rewrite to fix parts of the story, that must be handed in the same week.

Space constraints in newspapers in wire services are an issue so you MUST file your stories within the lengths you are given.

Requirements.

Do not miss class. We only meet once a week. If you miss three classes you fail, no excuses. Participation is class discussion is essential. Each class we will do a metro ‘newscheck’ examining Big Apple beat stories that appeared that week. As we go one everyone’s work will be also be examined and ‘workshopped’ by the class.

Everyone must submit a story pitch before assignments are due. It is a summary of how you will execute your feature. You will show your angles and who you plan to interview. The emphasis is on going out to report and face-to-face interviews.

All stories must be turned in on deadline. If you miss deadline, your grade on that assignment drops a letter. Appointments are often broken or pushed back so give yourself ample time to make adjustments if a source falls through or disappoints you. That happens, but doesn’t excuse missing deadline.

All stories for class – unless otherwise discussed -- are 700-900, double-spaced. All stories must have slugs, which I will provide.

At the end of each assignment you must add I a full list of sources: names, e-
mails, phone numbers, dates of interviews, websites, book referenced etc. I also want a brief paragraph on “lessons learned” from the assignment and what you might have done differently.

The Institute has a zero-tolerance policy on plagiarism, fabrication or any other type of misrepresentation; all are grounds for failing.

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**Grading**

Use the following guidelines to understand the grades you earn:

- **A** = Excellent. Almost publishable: thorough reporting, strong writing Second draft unnecessary.

- **A-** = Very good. Reporting questions emerge or the writing should be more polished.

- **B** = publishable with light editing

- **C** = publishable with a rewrite

- **D** = major problems with facts, reporting, writing

- **F** = missing key facts, containing gross misspellings, plagiarism or libel

**Required Reading and class tools.**

Some of these you may already have so will continue to use them. If you don’t
have them they are available at the bookstore or on Amazon.

* The Art and Craft of Feature Writing, William Blundell, Plume.


* The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law. Every story you write must be written with the stylebook at your side.

*City in the Sky: The Rise and Fall of the World Trade Center, Eric Lipton and James Glanz.

* Rudy Giuliani. Emperor of the City. Andrew Kirtzman.

* Purchase several reporter notebooks at NYU bookstore and have one with you at all times.

* The official Green Book of New York City. It’s available for sale at the Municipal Building. 1 Center St.

* A digital tape recorder. You just be ready at all times to interview someone.

**Online Resources**

Poynter.org, gothamgazette.com, newyorkmetro.com.

**Assistance**

It is very important for you to know that I am here for you. This is about learning, it’s about making mistakes, and it’s about growing. If you are struggling, unsure about anything, or just want to talk I am not hard to find, come talk to me.

The best thing about being a journalist is that you are always learning. Everyday is different, every assignment tests different skills, and you really do get better by doing it.
A schedule/calendar of assignments and due dates will be distributed the first day of class and emailed to everyone.