

Course Syllabus

Class Meeting Time and Place

Lecture: 10:50 a.m. to 12:05 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday, LSC Room 207

Lab: 1:40 p.m. to 4:10 p.m. Tuesday, LSC Room 208

Loftin Student Center (LSC), second floor, Journalism-Photography Department

Instructor

Ms. Susan A. Merkner, M.A.

Office hours: Mondays: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
 Tuesdays: 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.
 Wednesdays: 11 a.m. to noon
 Thursdays: 12:15 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.
 Fridays: 11 a.m.-noon
 and by appointment

Office location: Loftin Student Center 212-B (inside The Ranger newsroom)

Phone and voice mail: 486-1788 (office direct line) or 486-1765 (department)

Fax: 486-1789

E-mail: smerkner@alamo.edu

Catalogue Description/Prerequisites

News Gathering and Writing I, COMM 2311 (3-2-4).

(Three credit hours – two hours lecture weekly – four hours lab weekly)

Prerequisite: COMM 1307, ENGL 1301 and ability to keyboard.

Description: This course focuses on the fundamentals of writing news for the mass media. It includes instruction in method and techniques for gathering, processing and delivering news in a professional manner in various platforms. Lectures, discussions and in-laboratory work provide training under deadline pressure in gathering, organizing and writing a variety of basic news stories. Students cover campus and off-campus events for the weekly college newspaper, The Ranger, and The Ranger Online. This is a writing intensive (WI) course.

Texts

Required textbook is *"Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism,"* first edition, by Tim Harrower.

Required references are *The Associated Press Stylebook 2008* and *The Ranger Stylebook* (rev. January 2007 – available in the newsroom).

Additional reading is required in the San Antonio Express-News and The Ranger.

News style tutorials are from *"A 5 W's Approach to News Style — Internet Version"* by Marianne Odom.

Instruction

Much of the learning in this course depends on reading and understanding course materials. We will survey the course information through class discussions and lab experiences. Learning to meet deadlines and developing the ability to manage time also are part of the course.

As a Writing Intensive course, at least 60 percent of the course grade is based on writing assignments, which consist of stories, essay exams and other types of written work.

Objectives

This course is designed to give you a reporting experience that is as realistic as possible. Content, assignments and evaluations reflect current standards and practices of the journalism profession. While the writing techniques in this course primarily are geared to print and online journalism, the news-gathering principles, ethics and legal concerns apply to all media. By the end of the semester, if you complete the course successfully, you may expect to achieve the following:

- Learn to recognize news and make judgments about its value as demonstrated by your ability to turn in acceptable news tips each week.
- Learn how to gather information and write basic news stories on deadline.
- Learn to cover a beat as demonstrated by your ability to develop sources and regularly write new stories and follow-up stories as well as feature stories concerning your beat.
- Learn to conduct successful interviews and write stories based on interviews.
- Learn to write advances for speeches, meetings and other events.
- Learn to cover and write stories on speeches, meetings and events.
- Learn proper word usage, sentence construction and other principles of good writing
- Learn to use appropriately a variety of kinds of leads as demonstrated by using them in exercises and in laboratory stories.
- Learn the basics of newspaper style as exhibited by passing a quiz on style.
- Master basic principles of libel and privacy laws as well as Texas laws on open meetings and open records.

Course requirements and grade computation

Methods of instruction include lab assignments, lecture, discussion, PowerPoint presentations, videos, slides and group activities as well as readings.

Lab: Fifty-five percent of your grade will be based on lab work, including lab story exercises; news tips, calendar items and photo assignments; and the first copies of a minimum of 12 publishable byline stories for The Ranger and The Ranger Online. You must write and revise until publishable at least 12 to be considered for a C in the course, 14 to be considered for a B, and 16 to be considered for an A. Additional considerations in your lab grade include an evaluation by the instructor of your progress, ability to meet deadlines, ability to follow instructions, demonstration of understanding of the role of a reporter, reliability, persistence, willingness to tackle more complex and vital stories, diligence in turning in news tips and calendar items, and other qualities on which professional reporters are evaluated.

The profession demands stories that are on time, complete, accurate, show attention to detail and are free of spelling and style errors. Your stories should improve as the semester progresses, and so should your grades. Your goal is to turn in stories that require little editing. I will give a preliminary grade on the first copy you submit in lab each week, but you will revise each story until it is in publishable form.

Your stories will be evaluated on the news value as well as depth, content, form and news style of the first copy. You also will be required to submit calendar items, news tips and photo/art requests. The grading key is:

A = publishable quality

B = publishable with editing

C = substantial editing required

D = marginal quality

F = unacceptable.

Stories receive an automatic F if they contain a fact error or misspelled name. Ten points are subtracted from stories not submitted by the beginning of lab or not revised by the deadline. Correct spelling is based on *Webster's New World College Dictionary* and *The Associated Press Stylebook 2008*.

You will turn in a string book at the end of the semester containing clips/printouts of all your published stories. Only the stories in the string book will be counted toward your total requirement. You can earn a five-point bonus in your final average by writing the highest number of publishable inches in the class and a three-point bonus for the second-highest.

Course grade

55 percent for lab (see above)

15 percent for quizzes, class participation, class requirements, class assignments, textbook readings and news style

10 percent for the master style test

10 percent for the final exam

10 percent for the beat shadowing report.

Performance criteria

Students may be dropped from the course at any time during the semester if their work or work habits fails to meet reasonable expectations of journalistic standards. To pass the course with a C or higher, you must write a minimum of 12 publishable stories, pass the comprehensive style test with a grade of 70 or higher, and demonstrate on the final exam your ability to write a publishable news story. You must also complete all assignments. Please note: Weekly tests and class assignments cannot be made up if you are absent.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive on time. Students arriving after roll call may be refused admittance. Students who miss the equivalent of two weeks (12 class hours) from lab or lecture in any combination) may be dropped from the course. Students will have two points deducted from their final average for each hour's absence beginning with the 13th. An absence from lecture counts one hour. An absence from lab counts as two hours. ("Hour" equals a 50-minute session.)

Tips

- Be here and on time.
- Be prepared. Read your textbook or other materials assigned before class. You are responsible for material in each chapter assigned. The information in the text teaches you how to do what you are expected to do in lab each week.
- Keep up with current events. Read The Ranger, The Ranger Online and the San Antonio Express-News as a minimum, and watch radio and television news and read news on media Internet sites.
- Join in class discussions.
- Find out what happened in class if you have to miss. Ask a classmate for notes, assignments, etc. You are responsible for all material and assignments whether or not you are here.
- Take responsibility for your transcript. Do not simply stop coming to this class or any other. If you stop coming without dropping the course, you likely will receive an F. If you want to drop, please discuss it with me.
- Be a team player. Help your classmates and fellow Ranger staffers.
- Come up with your own story ideas.
- Jump at the chance for extra assignments and opportunities to get involved on The Ranger staff. The more you do in this class, the more you learn.
- Study the editing of your stories. You should not make the same mistakes week after week.
- Take responsibility for improving your skills in spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and word usage. If you haven't mastered all of these areas, now is the time to do it.
- Get in the habit of delivering more than is required.
- Assume new challenges. Tackle more complicated stories as the semester progresses. You may surprise yourself.
- Remember that the person who benefits most from all your work in this class is you. Ask successful former students.

- Realize that the ability to find, report and write and submit by deadline news stories targeted to an audience is the foundation for all journalism careers. Being able to cover any news story (as evidenced by your string book) gets your foot in the door for a media job. This class, possibly the most valuable course you will ever take, is the springboard to all upper division sequences in journalism/mass communications.

Learning Outcomes and Performance Objectives

Learning Outcome 1: The student will be cognizant of the role and responsibilities of a reporter for a news organization in a mass medium in a democratic society in informing the public and acting as a watchdog on government.

Performance Objectives/Methods of measurement for each objective

1. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of fairness and balance by interviewing multiple sources, attempting to report all sides of an issue and seeking responses from people maligned or criticized in news stories written for a laboratory grade and for publication in the student newspaper
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of accuracy by verifying facts and spelling of names and including details necessary to communicate to the targeted audience in news stories written for a laboratory grade and for publication in the student newspaper.
3. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the importance of objectivity by attributing opinion, using specific language and organizing information to represent all views in news stories written for a laboratory grade and for publication in the student newspaper.

Learning Outcome 2: The student will be cognizant of professional standards and procedures used in mass media for recognizing news, gathering information, writing stories by deadline and producing a newspaper.

Performance Objectives/Methods of measurement for each objective

1. The student will demonstrate an understanding of news values and targeting information to specific audiences by keeping abreast of current events through reading newspapers, magazines and news sites for weekly written examinations and being responsible for coverage of assigned areas of the college and turning in news tips that the student will develop into stories for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
2. The student will demonstrate an ability to gather information by developing sources, interviewing, observing and conducting research for news stories for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
3. The student will demonstrate an ability to propose, write and submit for editing a variety of stories, including spot news, advance stories and coverage of speeches, meetings and events, using a variety of leads for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
4. The student will demonstrate mastery of Associated Press style, grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and word usage by completing an interactive Internet study and examination and writing stories for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
5. The student will be cognizant of the skills, procedures, discipline and team work necessary to produce a publication by participating in weekly staff meetings, attending field trips to media outlets and shadowing reporters for metropolitan daily newspapers.

Learning Outcome 3: The student will be cognizant of the ethical principles, constitutional foundation and state and federal laws that influence media coverage in the United States.

Performance Objectives/Methods of measurement for each objective

1. The student will demonstrate an adherence to ethical principals outlined by organizations of journalism professionals and media outlets as evidenced by stories written for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the public's right to know and libel and privacy laws by completing written examinations, covering open meetings, seeking information legally available to the public and filing requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and the Texas Public Information Act when denied such information for stories written for a laboratory grade and publication in the student newspaper.
3. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the First Amendment and the protections and limitations affecting journalists by completing written examinations and by writing stories for a laboratory grade and publication in the student news

College, Department and Instructor Requirements

College requirements: A written, comprehensive final examination, not to exceed two and one-half hours in length, shall be given at the end of each semester for each course at the regularly scheduled time. Any exceptions to these requirements must be approved by the appropriate dean. Other examinations are given at the discretion of the instructor. A student who must be absent from a final examination should petition that instructor for permission to postpone the examination. A student absent without permission from a final examination is graded "F." Postponed examinations result in a grade of "I." The final exam must be taken within 120 calendar days from the end of the semester or the grade automatically becomes an "F."

San Antonio College Attendance Policy: Regular and punctual attendance at all classes and laboratories, day and/or evening, is required. A student absent for any reason is responsible for all work missed. Both tardiness and early departure from class are forms of absenteeism. The instructor establishes the policy with regard to each. Absences of each student are recorded without exception. The counting of absences begins on the first day of class. A student absent the equivalent of two weeks of instruction in a 16-week semester may be dropped by the instructor. If a student is dropped from a class for excessive absences, the instructor will record a grade of "W" (withdraw). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the withdrawals have been submitted.

Department requirements: A student wishing to withdraw from this class during the semester must process a formal withdrawal through the Office of Admissions and Records. Failure to withdraw formally will result in the assignment of a failing grade (F) for the course. Students may drop the class by obtaining and correctly completing the required paperwork by visiting the Office of Admissions and Records or the administrative office of the Journalism-Photography Department, Room 204-A of Loftin Student Center.

College Policies

A. San Antonio College does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, age or disability with respect to access, employment programs or services.

B. Students are urged not to bring children to either a class or a lab. Minors under the age of 12 must not be left unattended on campus.

C. ADA Statement: As per Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, if accommodation is needed, contact the Office of Disability Support Services, CAC 124C, Phone: (210) 486-0020.

D. A Rapid Response Team exists for the purpose of responding to emergencies. If you have a disability that will require assistance in the event of a building evacuation, notify Disability Support Services, Chance Academic Center 124C, Phone: (210) 486-0020.

E. Academic Dishonesty: Students may be subject to disciplinary proceedings resulting in an academic penalty or disciplinary penalty for academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test, plagiarism and collusion. For additional information refer to the "Student Code of Conduct" in the San Antonio College Bulletin.

F. San Antonio College Attendance Policy: Regular and punctual attendance at all classes and laboratories, day and/or evening, is required. A student absent for any reason is responsible for all work missed. Both tardiness and early departure from class are forms of absenteeism. The instructor establishes the policy with regard to each. Absences of each student are recorded without exception. The counting of absences begins on the first day of class. A student absent the equivalent of two weeks of instruction in a 16-week semester may be dropped by the instructor. If a student is dropped from a class for excessive absences, the instructor will record a grade of "WN" (withdrawn for non-attendance). It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the withdrawals have been submitted.

G. Alamo Colleges Department of Public Safety emergency phone numbers:

District Emergency Phone:	(210) 222-0911
District Police Dispatcher/Courtesy Patrol:	(210) 485-0099
District Weather Line (info on college closures):	(210) 485-0189

H. Students also must abide by the policies, procedures and rules set forth in the "Student Code of Conduct" and all other policies set forth in the San Antonio College Bulletin.

Classroom Behavior/Electronics/Smoking/Food and Drink

All cell phones, pagers, music players, laptop computers and other electronic devices must be turned off before class begins and remain off during the lecture portion of class. Any student who violates this policy may be dropped from the course. Personal cell phones may be used for lab work. Please refrain from eating or drinking (except water) in the classroom. Excessive trips outside the classroom for visits to the restroom or water fountain or for cell phone use will not be tolerated. San Antonio College is a smoke-free campus.

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