

J210: Writing, Reporting & Ethics II

Syllabus

Fall 2009

- Section 10744 Sat 9-11:45 a.m. MZ 361

INSTRUCTOR: Henrietta E. Charles

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OFFICE HOURS: 6-7 p.m. Th; noon-1 p.m. Sat

ONLINE RESOURCES

WEB PAGE: <http://newsforu.weebly.com/> *

(Mobile: 2021812749)

JOURNALISM DEPARTMENT: <http://www.csun.edu/journalism/>

J-DEPARTMENT SYLLABI: <http://www.csun.edu/journalism/resources/syllabi.html>

BOOK CLUB: <http://jbookclub.weebly.com> (Extra Credit)

THE COURSE:

This class is designed to introduce you to the basics of public affairs reporting, including police, courts, education and local government. The goals include:

- Increasing your knowledge and understanding of public agencies (particularly, municipal, school, county, state and federal administrative, legislative and judicial agencies).
- Learning about the resources available for reporting on public agencies and public figures.
- Developing the skills necessary to report on the meetings and actions of public agencies.
- Using and analyzing data from online sources and looking for trends/stories that can be developed into in-depth news articles.

There will be weekly lectures/presentations and in-class exercises for you to learn the basic techniques necessary to cover the specialized stories required for this class.

In addition, you will be required to gain out-of-class experience covering police news, court hearings, board of education and city council meetings. Outside assignments will be done on your own time, so plan accordingly.

PREREQUISITES:

- A “C” or better in Journalism 110
- Basic English/grammar and computer skills

PLEASE REMEMBER: This is *your* class. If you don’t understand something, ask. If something you are interested in is not being discussed or otherwise dealt with, let me know.

TEXTS/SUPPLIES:

1. **Inside Reporting**, by Tim Harrower
2. **Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law**, latest edition
3. **Shaking the Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism in America** by Bruce Shapiro (Editor)
(For Required Class Assignment)
4. A recent edition dictionary.
5. A portable jump/USB drive or other means of saving your in-class work.

OPTIONAL:

1. **The Elements of Style**, by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White
(or similar grammar book/aid)

COPY PREPARATION:

1. All writing exercises must include your name, the assigned title line (slug) and a date in the upper lefthand corner.

Example: Henrietta Charles
Court Hearing
Aug. 22, 2009 or 8-22-09

2. We will use proof reading/copyediting symbols to correct errors in printed/typed stories. Be sure to review these symbols (which will be handed out in class and posted on my Web page) and use them to correct your news style errors before turning in your assignments.
3. All assignments *must* be typed and double-spaced with paragraphs indented at least five spaces. Stories that don’t meet these criteria will be returned **ungraded**.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance will be monitored by keeping tabs on your weekly in-class assignments since something will be due at the end of each session. Three or more unexcused absences, missed assignments and/or underdeveloped writing skills due to absenteeism *will significantly lower*

your grade. For example, an "A" student's grade could drop to a "B" or lower due to excessive absences.

University policy defines an excused absence as illness/injury, family death/emergency, religious holiday, jury duty/other government obligation or a CSUN-sanctioned activity. You must **submit verifiable proof** to have an absence excused.

You will **not** be able to make up missed in-class assignments.

CLASS CONDUCT

- Computers **must be off** during class except when noted by instructor. Students Caught using their computers during class will receive a lower grade for all assignment submitted that evening. **No exceptions.**
- Cell phones and pagers **must be** on **silent** alert.
- Private conversations are not permitted during lectures.

GRADES:

Your final (course) grade will be based on: Beat reports = 10%; in-class assignments 15%; outside assignments = 30%; attendance/class participation = 5%; MidTerm – 20%; Final Exam = 20%.

Grade Scale			
A=	95-100	C =	73-77
A- =	90-94	C- =	70-72
B+ =	87-89	D+ =	67-69
B =	83-87	D =	63-67
B- =	80-82	D -	60-62
C+ =	77-79	F =	50 - 0

Your writing assignments will be graded for style, punctuation, grammar, spelling, accuracy, organization, clarity and content. In addition, your writing assignments will be judged on whether they include all of the key elements discussed in class, are well organized and accurate.

Substantial errors in grammar, spelling, AP style, sentence structure and accuracy — such as repeated misspellings of names or other key words — will result in your assignment grade being lowered.

Unless there are extenuating circumstances (cleared with the instructor) all written assignments must be turned in on the designated date/deadline.

COVERING YOUR BEAT:

Starting Aug. 29, you will be required to select a local city/community and begin providing weekly news coverage of that area. (See additional details in the class handout.)

Your coverage will consist of the following:

- Documenting your weekly coverage on a separate Blog, Twitter account or Facebook/MySpace.
- Posting three news briefs (see handout) about key events, decisions, etc. about the city/community you are covering in the J210 Newsroom (see separate handout.)
- Turn in a printout of your news briefs each week for class credit.
- **FYI:** This is also the community you will use for the required news stories about the police, courts and government so chose wisely.

OTHER POLICIES:

Honesty — The Journalism Department of California State University, Northridge is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating will be reported to the Dean of Students possible action and will receive a failing grade in the class. For a further explanation of the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult “Appendix E: Student Conduct” of the University Catalog.

Also, please remember that most the information posted on the Internet is protected by U.S. copyright laws. Passing this information off as your own is a violation of CSUN's plagiarism policy and carries the penalties outlined above.

PUT ANOTHER WAY: All of your written work for this class should be in your own words, not copied from a book/magazine/newspaper or the Internet. When words/work from other sources are used, the information should be credited to the proper source.

Diversity — Students in this course are strongly encouraged to broaden their journalistic experiences, with the instructor's help, by including sources and subjects from a variety of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds; senior citizens; the disabled and poor; gay men and lesbians; and similar groups. The intent is to ensure that your work reflects the diversity of the community.

STUDENTS' LEARNING OBJECTIVES –

To successfully complete this course, students will:

- Expand professional competency in reporting and writing through more challenging assignments;
- Focus on ethical issues in myriad journalistic situations;
- Prepare for reporting in the beats associated with public affairs journalism, including public safety, courts, municipalities and other government institutions and issues;
- Increase proficiency in using the resources available, including the Oviatt Library, the Internet and other human, paper and electronic sources;
- Explore techniques used in broadcast news, online news, new media and public relations writing, among other formats;
- Develop the ability to generate ideas and write feature stories;

- Analyze and write news stories based on statistics and technology;

SKILLS

As students move to J310 or J315, they should be able to:

- Develop and use diverse human, paper and electronic sources;
- Understand fundamental media law, such as libel, privacy, decency, copyright;
- Grasp Freedom of Information Act concepts, including how to use public record, open meeting and shield laws in California;
- Employ more advanced editing techniques and use of “Associated Press Stylebook” rules;
- Know and utilize the professional ethics codes and practices.
- It is also desirable for students to explore online story/package production using basic multimedia reporting/writing techniques.

OUTCOME

- To ensure that our majors can perform in J310 or J315, the J210 students should report and write a minimum of six to eight off-campus stories, including coverage of municipal government (neighborhood/city/county), public safety (police/fire), courthouse (civil/criminal cases), education (K-12/college), and related beats. They may also experiment with enterprise (sports/lifestyle), specialized beats (religion/business), features and opinion writing.

Your Contract – This syllabus clearly outlines the conditions and parameters of this class. Please review it carefully and keep a copy for reference. Acknowledgement of its contents implies an agreement by you to abide by the standards set forth within.

COURSE OUTLINE:

(Weekly scheduling may be changed/adjusted to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and/or faculty furlough days, which are pending approval.)

IR = Inside Reporting

Week 1 /Aug. 22

Introductions/**Covering A Beat**
BOOT CAMP: AP Style Review/Practice
Homework: IR – Chapters 3, Pages 90-91 & 54-55

Week 2/Aug. 29

Beat Report #1
Choose Your Beat, Develop a Contact List
BOOT CAMP: Review Basic Newswriting Skills
 In-Class Exercise
Homework: IR – Pages 66-69, 72-83

Week 3/Sept. 5

LABOR DAY ☺

Week 4/Sept. 12	Beat Report #3 Intro: Police/Crime Reporting In-Class Exercise Homework: Outside Assignment; IR – Pages 98-99
Week 5/Sept. 19	Beat Report #4 More on covering police news Homework: Pages 280-283
Week 6/Sept. 26	Beat Report #5 Intro: Covering Civil Courts & Lawsuits In-Class Exercise Homework: IR – Pages 100-101
Week 7/Oct. 3	Beat Report #6 Civil vs. Criminal Courts In-Class Exercise; Review for MidTerm Homework: Outside Assignment, Study for Exam
Week 8/Oct. 10	Beat Report #7 MIDTERM More on Court Reporting Homework – Reminder, Outside Assignment
Week 9/Oct. 17	Beat Report #8 Review MidTerm Finish Outside Assignment Homework: IR – Pages 104-105
Week 10/Oct. 24	Beat Report #9 Intro: Government/Local In-Class Exercise Homework: Outside Assignment
Week 11/Oct. 31	Beat Report #10 More on Local Government In-Class Exercise Homework: IR – Chapter 7
Week 12/Nov. 7	Beat Report #11 Finish Writing Outside Assignment Homework: Outside Assignment
Week 13/Nov. 14	Beat Report #12

Covering Education
In-Class Assignment
Homework: IR – Pages 132-133

Week 14/Nov. 21

Beat Report #13
In-Class Book Reviews: “Shaking the Foundations”
Homework: Review Online Resources

Nov. 28

HAPPY THANKSGIVING ☺

Week 15/Dec. 5

Beat Report #14
Class Discussion
Homework: Study for Final Exam

Finals Week/Dec. 17

FINAL EXAM (8-10 a.m.)

GUIDE TO THE J210 WEB PAGE: <http://newsforu.weebly.com/>

- **Main Page:** Handouts, examples of basic newswriting
- **Class Calendar:** Important dates, scheduling. (Will include Furlough/Budget-Related adjustments)
- **Public Affairs:** Handouts, examples of how to cover police, courts, local government and education issues
- **J210 Newsroom:** Post your weekly news briefs, discuss other issues
- **Common Reading:** Background on the department book for this semester “Shaking the Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism”
- **Blog:** Class updates, tips, other information. Usually updated weekly. (Can be monitored by direct link, news reader, email or handheld device (2021812749))

**** Email Policy:** Include Name and time of class in the subject line, and with any documents that are attached or included.

About the Professor:

Henrietta Charles has taught at Cal State Northridge on a full- and/or part-time basis since September 1991 and is a former adviser to the *Daily Sundial* and *Scene Magazine*. She has also taught newswriting, feature writing and mass communication classes on a full- and/or part-time basis at Cal State Long Beach, Santa Monica College and Long Beach City College.

Charles is also a substitute editor for *City News Service*.

She has more than 16 years experience as a newspaper reporter/editor covering general news stories, courts, education, diversity issues and labor at several small and medium-sized newspapers. These include the *Reno Evening Gazette/Nevada State Journal* in Reno, Nevada; the *Fresno Bee* in Fresno, Calif.; the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* in Long Beach, Calif. and the community news division of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Education: bachelor's degree in Journalism, master's degree in Professional (Creative) Writing, both from USC.