

Opinion Writing/Reporting

JOUR 4190-001

Spring 2018

Tuesday-Thursday 1 p.m. to 2:25 p.m.

Meeman Journalism Building Room 212

Instructor: Prof. Otis Sanford

Office: 318B Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: Monday, 3-5 p.m.; Thursday, 3-5 p.m. or by appointment

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS**CATALOG DESCRIPTION:**

Principles and practices for well-researched and well-written editorials, columns, op-ed submissions, reviews, broadcast commentaries and long form analysis/perspective pieces. Thorough examination of the purpose and impact of opinion journalism on readers, political leaders, policy makers and society at large.

PREREQUISITES:

JOUR3120 and JOUR3526

TEXTBOOKS:

None. Must read The Commercial Appeal editorial page and online opinion page daily, and the CA Sunday Viewpoint section, along with various opinion columns as assigned. Also, must read The New York Times and Washington Post editorials regularly, and content from the Real Clear Politics and Politico online sites.

CLASSROOM FORMAT:

Lecture and discussion will be used in the teaching of the class, and students will regularly write editorials, columns, short-form commentaries suitable for broadcast and at least one long-form perspective piece on a major political, social or public policy issue. Graduate students will write at least two long-form perspective/analysis pieces on a major political, public affairs or social issue. All out of class writing assignments must be accompanied by one of the following multi-media components: Infographic, photograph, photo slideshow, video, audio or podcast. Each student must submit at least four of these components with your outside assignments during the semester. Each class session will be set up similar to an editorial board meeting at a professional news organization. And each student is required to come to class prepared to discuss timely topics worthy of an editorial, column or commentary. Students also will routinely write opinion pieces in class on deadline. Plus, each student will participate in a group podcast project that will serve as the final exam for the course.

GRADING:

- In-class writing assignments: 35 percent (includes online portfolio)
- Outside long-form analysis and perspective packages: 20 percent
- Outside editorials, columns, etc., with multi-media component, and group podcast project: 35 percent
- Attendance and class participation: 10 percent
- Extra credit will be given for any exceptional work that, at the instructor's discretion, is submitted and published in The Helmsman, The Commercial Appeal or any appropriate publication.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE:

Tuesday, January 16 – Introduction and expectations for the semester. Brief in-class writing assignment. First outside assignment analyzing the first full year of the Donald Trump presidency, with interviews from a Trump supporter and a Trump critic. Assignment to be turned in by Jan. 25.

Thursday, January 18 – A detailed discussion of opinion writing, from editorials to columns, to broadcast commentaries to reviews and analytical think pieces. Qualifications for opinion writing. Why does opinion journalism remain relevant?

Tuesday, January 23 – A look at various national columns and analyses of President Trump's first year in office. Class editorial discussion. All students must have a topic in which to opine. Writing the editorial in class.

Thursday, January 25 – Turn in first outside writing assignment in Dropbox. Class editorial discussion. Assignment of second out of class opinion piece due Thursday, Feb. 8. In-class editorial writing exercise.

Tuesday, January 30 – Special guest opinion journalist.

Thursday, February 1 – No class. Work on second out of class assignment.

Tuesday, February 6 – The art of writing commentary for broadcast.

Thursday, February 8 – Outside opinion writing assignment due in Dropbox.

Tuesday, February 13 – More on writing commentary for broadcast. Assignment of outside television commentary due Tuesday, Feb. 27. In-class writing exercise.

Thursday, February 15 – Special guest appearance by a political newsmaker.

Tuesday, February 20 – In class editorial writing exercise based on meeting with newsmaker.

Thursday, February 22 – The do's and don'ts of opinion writing on social media.

Tuesday, February 27 – Television commentary due in Dropbox. Long form opinion writing for television.

Thursday March 1 – In-class opinion writing assignment.

Tuesday, March 6 and Thursday March 8 – Spring Break

Tuesday, March 13 – Assignment of outside opinion piece due March 22. Guest appearance by Dorothy Gilliam, the 2018 Norm Brewer First Amendment lecturer (extra credit available for attending lecture.)

Thursday, March 15 – Editorial discussion of Norm Brewer lecture, writing editorial in class. Assignment of MLK50 opinion piece due April 3.

Tuesday, March 20 – Editorial discussion and writing editorial in class.

Thursday, March 22 – Tentative visit to The Commercial Appeal editorial board meeting.

Tuesday, March 27 – Column Writing with flair. Assignment of personal column due April 10.

Thursday, March 29 – More discussion on column writing with guest columnist.
Tuesday, April 3 – Turn in MLK50 opinion piece in Dropbox. Discussion of MLK 50 years later.
Thursday, April 5 – Assessing national and local coverage of MLK anniversary.
Tuesday, April 10 – Personal column due in Dropbox. How to write an effective review with professional newspaper critic. Discussion of last major assignment.
Thursday, April 12 – Assignment of podcast project.
Tuesday, April 17 – Political endorsements – Are they still relevant?
Thursday, April 19 – A look at the newspaper political endorsements over the years.
Tuesday, April 24 – Major outside analysis/perspective package for undergraduates due in Dropbox. Assessing what we've learned this semester about opinion writing.
Tuesday, May 1 – Group podcast project due with link to instructor's email.

ASSESSMENT

HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET in JOUR 4190: Cognitive Objectives To Be Mastered (Ability To Explain, Analyze, Understand, Think Critically):

- Recognize the role of media in influencing the political, cultural and public policy dynamics locally, regionally, nationally and globally.
- Stay up to date on the various opinions from some of the leading media outlets including The Commercial Appeal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Politico and broadcast outlets such as NPR, PBS, MSNBC, Fox News and CNN.
- Develop a strong historical sense of how mass communication technologies originated and developed, and how 21st Century technology can be used to impact public opinion.
- Understand the variety of relationships between media and their audiences, including diverse audiences.
- Understand that strong journalistic opinions need not be mean-spirited and insulting.
- Understand that good writing is the backbone of any successful commentary.
- Understand the critical need for thorough reporting and research in order to write opinion pieces and produce broadcast commentaries that are persuasive and effective.
- Be sensitive to the needs of diverse and under-represented groups in presenting commentary and creating messages.
- Understand the history of news editorials and the role they played in shaping public opinion and holding policy makers accountable.
- Understand the changing landscape of opinion journalism and why it is relevant in today's mass media world.
- Understand the ongoing government regulation of the U.S. Media as well as the constitutional principles that guide it.
- Recognize the ethical and philosophical issues that arise in media culture and understand the range of viewpoints regarding these issues.
- Understand the behind-the-scenes operations and decision-making processes of major mass communication industries.
- Understand how new technology affects the media and communication.
- Understand what's involved in preparing for and advancing a career in the

- changing media.
- Understand the allied fields of advertising and public relations and their relationship to media systems.
- Understand mass communication theories and their application to media professions.

Performance Standards To Be Met (Demonstrable Skills, Abilities, Techniques, Applied Competencies):

- Earn a passing score on all writing assignments.
- Write with clarity, accuracy and authoritativeness.
- Create a podcast containing opinion content.
- Interview newsmakers who come to class and write an opinion piece based on the meeting.
- Participate in one or more outside activities (e.g., attend FOI lecture, interview media professional, visit the editorial board of The Commercial Appeal and submit one opinion/ op ed article worthy of publication in The Commercial Appeal.
- Make strong arguments for your position on certain topics, and try to convince others in the class to change their stance.

HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET IN JOUR 4190:

Awareness:

- Lecture, discussion on purpose of opinion writing.
- Knowledge of issues generating editorials, columns and broadcast commentaries.
- Awareness of diversity in all its forms and how it applies to all areas of mass communication.
- Ethical decision-making is discussed throughout the semester as it applies to opinion writing.
- Discussion questions will be posed in class to stimulate critical thinking. Independent thinking and critical analysis are encouraged.
- Each assignment will be carefully examined for sound reporting, relevant research and appropriate AP writing style.

DEPARTMENT POLICIES

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT:

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and contribute to it from every course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from his/her courses and/or professional experience and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in the capstone course for their majors.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. The department requires students to use WordPress to build their portfolio sites. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but must keep the portfolio active

for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail or Yahoo.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files, and Storify pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

EMAIL:

You must have your UM email account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the University.

MOBILE PHONES AND LAPTOPS:

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Your instructor will set the policy for her/her specific class.

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements, which are acceptable to your professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another class. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

CHEATING:

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

Further, as this is a journalism/mass communication class, students are expected to comply with copyright law, and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

“Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com’s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.” (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

ONLINE SETEs:

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that class. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.

DEADLINES:

Remember there’s a reason “DEAD” makes up half the word “deadline.” All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. If you get into trouble, talk to your instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

AP STYLE AND GRAMMAR:

All written work in this class should follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. If you don’t know the style for a particular phrase, look it up or ask your classmates or the instructor.

DISABILITY:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact your instructor privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

DIVERSITY:

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Mass communications reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

WEATHER POLICY:

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the university is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.