

Opinion Writing/Reporting

JRSM 4190/6190-001

Spring 2020

TR 3:30 p.m.-4:55 p.m.

Meeman 208

Prof. Otis Sanford

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Principles and practices for well-researched, well-written and well-illustrated 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 targeted readers, viewers, listeners, political leaders, policy makers and society at large.

Prerequisites

JOUR 3526 and 3120

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

No textbook is required. Must download the Real Clear Politics and Politico web sites and read them regularly, if not daily. Also must read various opinion columns and editorials as distributed by the instructor, and must read the instructor's weekly column on The Daily Memphian web site. Recommend reading the editorials and columns in the daily and Sunday Viewpoint section of The Commercial Appeal, The New York Times, The Washington Post and Wall Street Journal web sites. Also recommend occasionally viewing the instructor's daily television commentary on Local 24 News at 5 p.m. weekdays.

Classroom format

This course is designed to develop writing, reporting, and professional skills specific to opinion journalism. Students will learn about writing and reporting strategies and how to properly form opinions and conclusions for content produced in print, Web, social media, audio, and video. Further, we will discuss opportunities for shorter form opinion journalism on television and radio. Some sessions might require students to leave the classroom, in which case you will be governed by the rules of the classroom and the rules of the venue in which the class is meeting. A typical class session will consist of a lecture, discussion, and in-class writing. Most sessions will be set up to resemble a news organization's editorial board meeting, and students must come ready to discuss important issues and be prepared to write editorials on those issues. Students are also required to complete multiple writing and media projects throughout the semester, as well as a final project.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 4190/6190-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

Course Requirements

Access to online web sites mentioned above. Students must attend each class sessions because writing assignments will be required during most class meetings. Students also will be required to write up to five or more opinion pieces outside of class on major political, social or public policy issues. Each assignment must be accompanied by one of the following multi-media components: Infographic, photograph, photo sideshow, video, audio or podcast. Students will also be assigned a final project which will consist of a long-form analysis or perspective piece on a topic of public interest. It also must include a multi-media component. All outside assignments are to be submitted electronically via eCourseware. **LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.**

Graduate Student Requirements

Students enrolled in JOUR 6190 will be required to complete an additional assignment, which will be determined by the instructor and student. The assignment will be based on the student's individual interests and may be either research based or practical.

Grading:

A = 92%-100%

A- = 90%-91%

B+ = 87%-89%

B = 82%-86%

B- = 80%-81%

C+ = 77%-79%

C = 72%-76%

C- = 70%-71%

D = 65%-69%

F = 0%-64%

Grading Philosophy: A=Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification; B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement but would require revision to be used professionally; C=Satisfactory work that adequately meets requirement but would need significant revision; D=Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality; F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirement. NOTE: Plusses and minuses may be given.

Other issues

There will tentatively be several guest speakers during the semester assuming schedules can be worked out, and students will be required to write opinion pieces based on some of those interviews. There will also be a tentative field trip to a Memphis City Council meeting.

COURSE SCHEDULE

TENTATIVE TIMETABLE

Note: What follows is a tentative schedule. The syllabus is a general plan for the course; and the instructor reserves the right to make changes as the semester progresses. If there are any changes, you will of course be notified in a timely manner.

Week 1

Tuesday, January 21 – Introduction and expectations for the semester. Brief in-class writing assignment. First outside assignment analyzing the impact that the impeachment proceedings should or should not have on student interest in politics, the U.S. Constitution and voter turnout among young people in 2020. Assignment to be turned in by Jan. 30.

Thursday, January 23 – A detailed discussion of opinion writing, from editorials to columns, to perspectives, to broadcast commentaries to reviews and analytical think pieces. Qualifications for professional opinion writing. Why does opinion journalism remain relevant?

Week 2

Tuesday, January 28 – Why do editorial boards exist? Who sits on the board? What are their qualifications? Why is diversity in all its forms important? What is happening to editorial boards at newspapers around the country?

Thursday, January 30 – A look at various national columns and analyses of the impeachment proceedings. Class editorial discussion. All students must have a topic in which to opine. Writing the editorial in class. Turn in first outside writing assignment in Dropbox.

Week 3

Tuesday, February 4 -- Class editorial discussion on various topics presented by students. Assignment of second out of class opinion piece due Thursday, Feb. 18. In-class editorial writing exercise. Students must come to class with a topic.

Thursday, February 6 – Special guest opinion journalist or newsmaker.

Week 4

Tuesday, Feb. 11– The art of writing commentary for television/radio broadcast.

Thursday, February 13 – No class. Work on second out of class assignment.

Week 5

Tuesday, February 18 – Second outside opinion writing assignment due in Dropbox. Writing an effective book review. Book review writing assignment due April 9.

Thursday, February 20 – Students must bring idea to class for short form broadcast commentary. In-class writing assignment suitable for broadcast commentary. Students will then be required outside of class to produce short audio version of that commentary. The commentary should be no longer than two minutes.

Week 6

Tuesday, February 25 – Special guest appearance by a political newsmaker to discuss upcoming presidential primary in Tennessee and around the south.

Thursday, February 27 – In class editorial writing exercise based on meeting with newsmaker and class discussion of upcoming primary election.

Week 7

Tuesday, March 3 – The do's and don'ts of opinion writing on social media.

Thursday, March 5 – In class discussion assessing the outcome of the Tuesday presidential primary particularly in Tennessee and Shelby County. In-class writing assignment on the primary.

Week 8

Spring Break (No classes)

Week 9

Tuesday, March 17 – Column writing with flair, depth and strong point of view. Assignment of outside column. Each student must present idea to instructor by Thursday. Column due Thursday, March 26.

Thursday, March 19 – Special guest, New York Times columnist Frank Bruni, the 2020 Norm Brewer First Amendment lecture speaker.

Week 10

Tuesday, March 24 – Sports commentary for print and broadcast. What does it mean to be a “homer” or a perpetual antagonist? And how does that impact your credibility as a columnist and commentator.

Thursday, March 26 – How to comment effectively on social issues without overt bias and without turning off your audience. In class writing assignment. Please come to class with a topic idea.

Week 11

Tuesday, March 31 – Tentative visit to Memphis City Council meeting at City Hall.

Thursday, April 2 – Tentative visit by Wendi Thomas of MLK50 Justice Through Journalism.

Week 12

Tuesday, April 7 – Political endorsements: Are they still relevant? Discuss endorsing a presidential candidate. Out of class assignment is to write an endorsement editorial for the presidential candidate of your choice among those still in the race.

Thursday, April 9 – Putting together a group podcasting project. Group podcast due April 23. Book review due today.

Week 13

Tuesday, April 14 -- How to write an effective review with professional newspaper critic. Discussion of last major assignment.

Thursday, April 16 – In class discussion and topics and in class writing assignment.

Week 14

Tuesday, April 21 – More discussion of final opinion writing and reporting project.

Thursday, April 23 – Group podcasting project due. Class discussion of each podcast.

Week 15

Tuesday, April 28 – Final class discussion. What have we learned. How to use it and where do you go from here.

(Final project due by Tuesday, May 5)

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Five Pillars in JOUR 4190/6190

- *Critical Thinking:* Students understand the vital ingredients necessary to create columns, editorials, and other forms of opinion journalism. Students learn to think through their positions on issues, to debate their position with fellow students and the instructor, and to form clear conclusions.
- *Media Literacy:* Students are required to read various forms of opinion journalism regularly from diverse sources. Students must have an awareness of major news events and the issues that confront the media at the local and national level. Students also must be aware of trends in pop culture and politics. Opinion writing has ballooned during the last 20 years with the growth in social media and online news sites. Students must understand and evaluate what is, and is not, credible opinion journalism.
- *Multimedia:* Students learn to use podcasts, smartphones and various social media to reach many different audiences who are interested in thoughtful opinion journalism and a critical analysis of current issues.
- *Professionalism:* Students are introduced to the qualities and qualifications necessary to produce clear and credible opinion journalism by examining the varied ways opinion writing is done at the professional level. Special emphasis is given to media organizations with a legacy of superior reporting that leads to strong, convincing commentary.
- *Writing:* Students write both long form and short form opinion pieces, integrating various sources, original reporting and statistical information into their work. Students are evaluated based on the quality and clarity of writing assignments, and much of their original content must be suitable for alternative platforms, including blogs and podcasts.

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4190/6190

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the

significance and impact of mass communications in a global society

- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Think critically, creatively and independently
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

Awareness

- Students increase awareness through lectures, required reading and discussion of the purpose of opinion writing and the techniques necessary to produce quality commentary.
- Students gain knowledge of issues generating editorials, columns and broadcast commentaries.
- Students gain an 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.

Understanding

- Students learn the difference between objective news reporting and commentary. Students also learn the various ways that opinion journalism is utilized in today's media environment.
- Students critically analyze various forms of opinion journalism and offer input during class discussions.

Application

- Students demonstrate an understanding of the guiding principles for opinion writing by producing content that adheres to those principles.
- Students work together on a final product using podcasting to produce opinion content.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA 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 graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review

while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or Squarespace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they 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 lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

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 writing 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

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class 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). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (“C-”) in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student’s online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

Academic integrity

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 students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media 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 rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

Online SETEs

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the 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 must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Diversity and inclusivity

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. Media 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.

Student support

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.