

Opinion Writing/Reporting

JOUR 4190/6190-001

Spring 2022

MW 9:10 a.m.-10:35 a.m.

Meeman 208

Prof. Otis Sanford

Office: 318B Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment

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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 3120/3629

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 ABC24 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 public 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://memphis.instructure.com>
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 many 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 slideshow, 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 Canvas. **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

Wednesday, January 19 – Introductions and expectations for the semester. Discussion of why students are enrolled in the class and what they hope to learn and gain. First outside assignment analyzing whether there should be a residency requirement for public safety employees, particularly police, to live within Shelby County. Assignment to be turned in by Jan. 31. Will not be accepted late.

Week 2

Monday, January 24 – 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?

Wednesday, January 26 – 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?

Week 3

Monday, January 31 – 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.

Wednesday, February 2 -- Class editorial discussion on various topics presented by students. Assignment of second out of class opinion piece due Wednesday, Feb. 16. In-class editorial writing exercise. Students must come to class with a topic.

Week 4

Monday, February 7 – Special guest opinion journalist or newsmaker.

Wednesday, February 9– The art of writing commentary for television/radio broadcast.

Week 5

Monday, February 14 – No class. Work on second out of class assignment.

Wednesday, February 16 – Second outside opinion writing assignment due in Dropbox. 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. Due date is Monday, February 21. The commentary should be no longer than two minutes.

Week 6

Monday, February 21 – Writing an effective book review. Book review writing assignment due April 6.

Wednesday, February 23 – Special guest appearance by a political newsmaker to discuss upcoming Shelby county elections.

Week 7

Monday, February 28 – The do's and don'ts of opinion writing on social media.

Wednesday, March 2 -- In class discussion assessment of the first half of the semester. Discussion of major editorial topic in the news. In class editorial writing assignment.

Week 8

March 7-11 – Spring Break (No classes)

The remaining class schedule will be distributed by March 1.

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

Students 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.

COVID-19 protocols for this course

COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy - Masks and Social Distancing

Faculty, staff, students and visitors are expected to monitor current health and safety measure requirements posted to our website and shared through other official communication channels including, but not limited to University email. Definitions related to those requirements and enforcement mechanisms appear in the [COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy \(GE2040\)](#). **Please be reminded that the University currently requires that all persons, regardless of vaccination status, wear masks indoors and in places where appropriate social distancing is not possible.**

Classroom experiences from recent semesters have shown that the campus community generally understands and complies voluntarily with the mask requirement. The policy does permit faculty members to take action for non-compliance of mask use. Additionally, if students have concerns about faculty or staff mask use, contact Human Resources at hr@memphis.edu or 901.678.3573. Faculty who are delivering on-campus instruction may remove their face mask to teach, provided they are located within a delineated teaching area that is no less than 6 feet from students.

Student Health

Students who are experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing or a higher than normal temperature should inform me by email so they can be excused from class and should stay home. Students should contact their health care provider or the Student Health Center at <https://www.memphis.edu/health/>.

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at deanofstudents@memphis.edu or 901.678.2187.

Testing & Notification

The University will continue to provide testing for the entire campus community. The details regarding test availability and locations can be found [here](#). Do not come to campus if you are experiencing symptoms, are in isolation or quarantine due to positive test results or exposure, pending test results, or have reason to believe you have come in contact with the virus.

Student Resources

Students who need additional resources can contact the Dean of Students Office at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.

Guidelines for classes, labs and equipment in Meeman Journalism Building in Spring 2022

- Anyone feeling sick should stay home.
- Social distance from all others at least 6 feet when possible.
- Wear a mask at all times when in University buildings and outside when social distancing isn't possible.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer regularly.
- No more than one person in the elevator at a time.
- Disinfect your workstation before and after use, including desks, keyboards, mice and screens. Wash your hands after cleaning.
- Air purifiers must run at all times during class meetings.