

# Social Justice Writing/Reporting

JOUR 4185/6185-001

Tuesday/Thursday 9:40-11:05 a.m., MJ 208

Spring 2024

## Prof. Laura Kebede-Twumasi

**Office:** 316 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

**Email:** [lfkebede@memphis.edu](mailto:lfkebede@memphis.edu)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Writing and reporting news and news feature stories on issues concerning social justice.

### Prerequisites

JOUR 3120 or 3629; JOUR 3526

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

- Online Civil Wrongs Research Guide at University of Memphis Library

### Classroom format

This course pushes students to apply their discipline – whether journalism or history – to historical research and compelling storytelling to publish written, audio, and/or video pieces accessible to the public through the [Institute for Public Service Reporting](#) and [WKNO-FM](#). By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze primary sources
- Conduct oral history and/or journalistic interviews
- Improve narrative writing
- Experiment with audio storytelling
- Fact-check stories for accuracy
- Articulate and apply the industry's debate around objectivity

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning 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 4185-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

### Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all class meetings. This work is collaborative as well as individual, so your contribution and input during class is vital. More than three absences during the semester will adversely affect your grade. Because this work involves real-world stakeholders and we are working on a deadline to publish our work, you should prioritize this class.

### **Assignments**

All written assignments will be in Associated Press (AP) style to align with guidelines from [Hearst Journalism Awards Program](#) guidelines, which we seek to enter. You can access the AP Stylebook [online](#) or at our library.

We will also have an embedded librarian who can point you to research materials or resources that may help you. Don't be ashamed of seeking help and guidance. We learn by asking good questions and being humble enough to recognize when we need help. This is a group effort so we have to lean on each other to make this project the best it can be.

### **Issues**

Outside of class, I prefer that you email me your questions or concerns so I can assess if we need to hop on a call, meet in person, or handle via email. Please use your university email address. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours. If you're running into lots of obstacles in your research or reporting, you should bring it up in class for us to discuss. Your peers may be facing similar problems. When putting together your podcast script, I will be available for feedback before you turn in your draft. The sooner, the better. You should call or text me if a time-sensitive issue arises in your reporting such as a source raises serious concerns and you need help coming up with a response.

### **Grading**

Your final grade will be based on the following:

#### **Short bio for website (25 points)**

#### **Reading/listening reflections (50 points each)**

Two reflections on assigned readings of 600 to 700 words

#### **Story memo (100 points)**

750 to 1,000 words

#### **Interview questions and sound list (75 points)**

Prepared questions for interviewees for your portion of the podcast plus list of ambient audio you group plans to record

#### **Draft script (200 points)**

Group project

#### **Script peer review (75 points)**

Written peer review of script drafts

**Final script (300 points)**

Group project

**Other assignments as needed (125 points)**

**Total 1,000 points**

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%  
B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%  
C+ = 76.5-79.4% ; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%  
D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%  
F 0-59.4%

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

Due to the nature of this project, this schedule will likely change. As in the real world, we must adapt to the evolving nature of the stories and research we are working on and be flexible. However, I will keep you informed of any changes so you can plan accordingly.

*Week 1: Introduction to Elaine Massacre*

Jan. 16

Review of expectations, syllabus, and introductions  
What we know  
How we know it  
What we don't know and what we aim to find out

Jan. 18

Screening of ["We've Just Begun" documentary](#)  
Discussion questions

- What are some recurring themes?
- What are you curious to know more about?
- What connections do you see to the present?
- Where can we go to find out more?

Due 11:59 p.m. Friday, Jan. 19: Short bio for website

*Week 2: What is social justice reporting?*

Jan. 23

How do we cover social justice objectively? Should that be a goal? What do we mean by objectivity? Discuss the following:

- Listen to “[The Half Truth About Lynching](#)” episode 3 of [The View from Somewhere](#) podcast by Lewis Raven Wallace. See [related links and transcript](#).
- Read “[A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists](#)” by Wesley Lowery, New York Times

Due 9 a.m. Jan. 23: Reflection on readings (600-700 words)

Jan. 25

Guest speaker: Brian Mitchell, co-author of “Blood in their Eyes,” Elaine Massacre researcher

*Week 3: How do journalists and historians uncover and analyze the past?*

Jan. 30

Historians

- Grand narratives of American history
- Analyzing and compiling sources
- Historical context and biases in interpretation

Feb. 1

Journalists

- Trauma-informed journalism
- Interviewing tips
- Fact checking and organizing your reporting
- Review story memo template for presentations Feb. 20

*Week 4: Making your pitch, part 1*

Feb. 6

Prepare for site visit

- How do we decide what’s most important to include in our podcast?
- What does our audience want to know?
- Why does this matter?

Feb. 8

Group work and research for story memos

## *Week 5: Audio storytelling*

Feb. 13

Listen to [“The Deed”](#) episode from Uncivil podcast and pay attention to the following. We’ll discuss in class

- What made the storytelling compelling? (and/or) What was missing?
- How did the episode capture your attention and keep it?
- What did you notice about how the story blended past and present?
- What audio sources or narrating techniques did they use to mix up the sound?
- What are ways you think we can apply these storytelling techniques to our topic?

Due 9 a.m. Feb. 13: Reflection on [“The Deed”](#) (600 to 700 words)

Feb. 15

Guest speaker: Christopher Blank, news director at WKNO-FM

- Audio recording tips for phone and in-person
- Crafting scenes
- Reporting ethics

## *Week 6: Making your pitch, part 2*

Feb. 20

Story memo presentations

Due 9 a.m. Feb. 20: Story memos

Feb. 22

Discuss editorial decisions on story memos and podcast episodes

Review requirements for script drafts

Group work and research for script drafts

## *Week 7: Script Writing, part 1*

Feb. 27

Script writing

- [How audio stories begin](#)
- [You asked: How do you tell a story in 3 acts?](#)

Group work and research for script drafts

Feb. 29

Group work and research for script drafts

Bonus activity: Headshots for [Institute's website](#)

Due 11:59 p.m. Friday, March 1: Interview questions and sound lists

*Week 8: No classes March 5 and 7, SPRING BREAK*

*Week 9: Script Writing, part 2*

March 12 and 14

Group work and research for script drafts

*Week 10: Script Writing, part 3*

March 19 and 21

Group work and research for script drafts

Due 11:59 p.m. Saturday, March 23: Script drafts

*Week 11: Editing, part 1*

March 26

Peer and instructor edits of scripts

Due 9 a.m. March 26: Peer reviews

March 28

Group work on final script drafts

*Week 12: Editing, part 2*

April 2 and 4

Group work on final script drafts

Due 11:59 p.m. Saturday, April 6: Final script draft

*Week 13: Production*

April 9 and 11

Audio editing for promotional content

### ***Week 14: Reflection***

April 16

Project debrief exercise

April 18

Publish promotional content, final audio editing for episodes

### ***Week 15: Wrap up***

April 23

Any remaining tasks for production and promotion

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4185**

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current 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)*

- Gain familiarity with ethical issues in reporter neutrality and objectivity in coverage of issues of social justice.

### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Relate stories to intended audience.
- Think critically regarding story sources and information gathering particularly as they related to marginalized and oppressed communities.
- Demonstrate an ability to prepare reports and write about issues such as race, class, sexuality, gender, gender identity and expression, ability and religion.
- Acquire ability to conduct interviews, gather information in person, by phone and digitally, as well as conceptualize a story.
- Demonstrate ability to use trauma informed reporting techniques.
- Demonstrate basic video shooting and editing skills.

### **How assessment of student learning will be met**

#### *Awareness*

- Become aware of the professional protocol such as story meetings and reporter responsibilities.
- Learn about the importance of critical thinking in justice stories.

#### *Understanding*

- Understand the ethical and professional challenges facing a journalist today.
- Appreciate the role of social media and the internet in today's journalism industry.
- Study the principles of effective storytelling.

#### *Application*

- Develop story ideas, setting up interviews, selecting appropriate sources for stories, writing news stories in various formats, editing.
- Take weekly news quizzes.
- Give and receive criticism by peers when stories are reviewed collectively in class.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, 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
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### **Email**

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

### **Electronic devices**

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

### **AI/Chat GPT**

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

### **Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

### **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You 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. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### **Academic integrity**

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and 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, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws 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 and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). 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.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; 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 seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. 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.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate

with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.