Multimedia News Lab

JOUR 4998-001/6998-001

Fall 2025

Class Meeting: Mondays, Wednesdays, 2:20-3:45 p.m., MJ 202

Thomas J Hrach, Ph.D.

Office: 308 Meeman Journalism Building
Office Hours: MW 10 a.m.-noon or by appointment
Email: thrach@memphis.edu

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Write, produce content for a personal beat-driven blog that will house multimedia stories on important, complex topics in the city of Memphis; course will mirror collaborative opportunities underway in industry and provide students with the strongest multimedia material possible for portfolios.

Prerequisites

JOUR 3526
Two advanced writing courses

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Associated Press Stylebook.

Recommended resources: These sites are a great source of inspiration for stories you could do in your beat. It's a great idea to be up to date on the best work being done in the media industry.

Classroom format

The class will be run as a professional newsroom. Class sessions will consist of both lecture and laboratory time to be determined by the instructor. Class discussion will involve story coverage plans and training related to various writing and multimedia skills and multicultural considerations. Participation is an important consideration in final grades.

You will work on a semester-long project that incorporates in-depth reporting and multimedia content production. Each student will be assigned deadline stories/packages throughout the semester. A schedule will be provided each week for various duties. Each week students will have one of three positions: reporter, editor, or on call. It is important that students adhere to the schedule each week.

During the second half of the semester, the class will consist of a series of guest speakers who will address issues of professionalism, job searches, industry standards and best practices, and career options in journalism. We will also use this time to work on your online portfolios and resumes and prepare you for the professional world. A schedule of speakers will be provided by midterm.

Accessing the course website
1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: https://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 4998-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

Course Requirements
During the semester, each student will work on a multimedia team covering some aspect of the city of Memphis. Students will work on teams, but the work is not "group work". You'll be responsible for your own deadlines and projects. Each week you will be assigned a job and a story/package to complete. Some weeks you may be listed as "on call" this means that you will not have an assigned story, but must be available in case some story breaks during the week.

You will start posting stories/packages by week four and run until the end of week 14. In total you will post five-six stories, edit/social media two-three weeks, and on call for two-three weeks.

The three jobs each week are as follows:
Reporter—this will be a news, news feature, or profile multimedia package (can be text or broadcast).
Service—this will be a service journalism multimedia package (can be text or broadcast)
Editor/Social Media—you'll edit work produced by your classmates and post the previous week's content to the project's socials.
On Call—you'll be "off" this week but must be available to pick up any breaking news. This will also give you a chance to work ahead on your next package.

You'll receive a grade for your reporting/service stories and for your editing/social media work. You will not be graded for your on-call week unless you pick up a story.

Online portfolio: Students will create a professional online portfolio as a tool to promote themselves on the job market. The details and requirements of the portfolio will be discussed later in the semester.

Undergraduate Class point breakdown

Deadline 1	100 points
Deadline 2	100 points
Deadline 3	100 points
Deadline 4	100 points
Deadline 5	100 points
Deadline 6	100 points
Deadline 7	100 points
Deadline 8	100 points
Deadline 9	100 points
Deadline 10	100 points
Resume Update	100 points
Online Portfolio	100 points
Total	**1,000 points***

This is to account for the two weeks you'll be on call during the semester. You won't be graded for those weeks. If you pick up on-call stories, your total possible points will be greater than 1,000.

Grading

Assignment categories and points or percentage weights.

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%

Grading Philosophy: A=Professional quality work that could be use with little or no modification; B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement but would require revision to be used professionally; C=Satisfactory work and 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

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.

Errors and penalties: Edit stories carefully. Your multimedia projects are graded for content minus mechanical errors. Spelling, grammar and style count for each activity. A fact error will result in the reduction of one letter grade for each error. Fact errors include inaccurate information, errors and typos in names, numbers, addresses, dates, quotes, and proper nouns. **Bottom line: reporters must self-edit. Read and re-read and edit and re-edit your assignments.**

Final comment: Sharpening multimedia, reporting, and editing skills is a journey best undertaken as a team, with open hearts, open minds and good humor. You can learn much from your peers as from your instructor. I encourage you to speak frequently and work together on stories/assignments with your classmates. We will critique our own work in class, and I will accept rewrites and additional multimedia elements to stories.

If you want to talk about the class, feel free to come and see me. Don't worry if you don't have an appointment. My office door is often open. If my office hours are inconvenient for you, make a special appointment and I will work to accommodate you. I want to help you succeed.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction/Topic Brainstorming
Course Introduction; Discuss requirements; Brainstorm topic ideas.

Week 2: Service Journalism Workshop/Project Planning & Brainstorming
Learn best practices for service journalism; Possible guest speaker; Wireframing websites; Site branding ideas

Week 3: Site Building
Build site for class project; Make sure everyone understands how to use site; Review schedule

Week 4: Deadline One
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 5: Deadline Two
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 6: Deadline Three
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 7: Deadline Four
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 8: Spring Break
No new assignments this week; must still meet deadlines as assigned

Week 9: Deadline Five
Budget Meetings; Guest Speaker

Week 10: Deadline Six
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 11: Deadline Seven
Budget Meetings; Professional Development/Resume/Portfolio Work

Week 12: Deadline Eight
Budget Meetings; Mandatory newsroom time

Week 13: Deadline Nine
Budget Meetings; Guest Speaker

Week 14: Deadline Ten/J+SM ProDay April 16
Budget Meetings; J+SM ProDay mandatory in UC

Week 15: Wrap-up Week
Final clean-up of sites; recap of semester

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4998
- 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.
- Effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- 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.

How professional values and competencies will be met
Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)
- Develop advanced understanding of newswriting for multiple applications and media platforms.
- Establish a working knowledge of professional news routines in a multimedia setting.
- Learn to cover diverse communities with consideration for race, gender, gender identity, ability, sexual orientation, class, and ethnicity.
- Research and report stories with multimedia tools.
- Expand knowledge of the resources available for communications professionals.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)
- Understanding of grammar skills specific to journalism and mass communication.
- Ability to plan and pitch a multimedia news project.
- Ability to create multimedia news projects that incorporate multiple platforms and showcase many skills.
- Understanding of many multimedia storytelling tools available to journalists.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Become aware of the role new media plays in society and in the field of journalism.
- Become aware of the ethical treatment of subjects and issues through a multicultural and multimedia lens.

Understanding

- Develop an understanding of multimedia tools and platforms that are appropriate for news storytelling.

Application

- Gather information from sources and from extensive research for news projects related to the mission of the DailyHelmsman.com
- Develop multimedia packages that incorporate several media platforms including: writing, photography, audio, audio-visual, video, and data visualization.
- Participate in weekly news budget meetings with Daily Helmsman editorial leaders.
- Provide editorial feedback to peers.

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.