

**University of North Texas**  
**The Mayborn School of Journalism**  
**JOUR 4410.001: Reporting of Public Affairs**

Instructor: **Neil Foote**  
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Office hours: By appointment

Semester: FALL 2013  
Class sessions:  
**Thursdays, 3:30 p.m. – 6:20 p.m.**  
Meeting Place: GAB 337, Denton, Texas

**Course Description**

Read the newspaper, look at television ... go online. Public affairs reporting is all around you. As a reporter, one of your early assignments will be covering cops, courts, governments, civil servants and politicians. It's what makes villages, towns, cities, states and federal governments tick. Public affairs stories address the most mundane issues, but in the long run the subjects of these stories are directly impacting the lives of every reader and viewer. Many of the most coveted awards in journalism are won by journalists who have gone beyond the ordinary, and dug deep to reveal tremendous inconsistencies, illegal behavior and wrongdoings by those in the centerpiece of public affairs.

As part of this course, you will be reporting and writing stories about communities around you as well as participating in active, in-class discussions about public policy, community journalism and media ethics.

**Course Objectives**

At the end of this class, you will have achieved the following:

- Report and write stories about public institutions
- Learn the organizational structure and basic functionality of key public institutions, such as police departments, the court systems and the school boards/independent school districts
- Learn how to report, research and write short- and long-form investigative stories
- Learn about the depth and breadth of public documents and how to access them
- Understand how to file a Freedom of Information Act letter
- Understand the fundamental role of a free press, the role of the First Amendment and the importance of open government
- Learn the importance of fairness and ethics in covering government institutions and politicians

**Reading and Textbook Requirements**

- Read daily print or online editions of *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*.
- Read additional articles and essays.
- You are encouraged to bring examples of articles to class on relevant subjects to discuss.
- You are expected to be proficient in the use of AP Stylebook. The Freedom of Information Act Handbook is optional. You can order it from the Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas.
- **All articles written for the class must include a source list with the names, phone numbers and emails of people interviewed as well as any website used to source content.**

**Required:**

- "The Elements of Journalism, What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect," by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel, (Three Rivers Press, 2007, 288 pages) (Revised updated edition)
- Database Journalism Handbook – Available Online – FREE - <http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/>

**Attendance: You are required – and expected - to attend every class.** Your participation is absolutely essential to your personal success, and to completely engage the class in the learning experience. You cannot make up missed assignments if you have an unexcused absence. The goal is to treat this class as if it were a newsroom. If you're going to be absent, call me/email me and bring to class the next class meeting immediately following your absence a signed note or letter that supports your absence.

**Class assignments:**

**We will be using Blackboard (<http://learn.unt.edu>).** You must check it to get assignments and to post assignments. I will post your grades to Blackboard, and in many cases will grade your work electronically. Your grades posted on Blackboard will not reflect your final grades, but will give you a very good estimate. Remember, each assignment is weighted so for each assignment, you will receive a certain number of points. For example, the assignment has a weight of 15% of the total grade. If you get an 85 on one of that homework assignment, you multiply 85 by .15 to get the total points for that specific assignment: 12.75. Total all the points for each assignment to get your final grade.

If you miss a deadline in submitting a story, you will not be able to submit it late because Blackboard will lock you out. **You will receive a zero for that assignment.** Late assignments are completely unacceptable. You must learn to respect deadlines.

**You will be doing extensive reporting and writing in this class. All of your assignments must have your byline, your email, the date, and must be typewritten, double-spaced and must include a source list. Some assignments may require you to post them online.**

The assignments should be written as if they were being published in print or online. If some of the stories are strong enough, they will be offered to the editors of the NT Daily or NTDaily.com.

You will be **assigned a city beat** where you will be completely responsible for generating the stories for this class. Time management is an essential component of this class along with your journalism skills, critical thinking and creativity.

**Final Project.** Traditionally, I have waited until about midway through the class to discuss the final project, but this semester, I am going to give you more time to do a more thorough and analytical job. Around the fourth week, we'll discuss the project and around mid-term, you'll be expected to provide a cogent outline of what you'll be investigating. The goal of this project is to combine all of your journalism skills into an enterprise, investigative article that stretches your ability beyond the norm. You will draw upon your experience on what we've learned throughout the semester. The expectation is that this 1,000 to 1,500 article, including a presentation to class about your findings, is a great opportunity for you to have a very solid piece for your portfolio.

**Guest speakers:** To help make the class more relevant and interesting, we will have guest speakers – journalists, county officials, attorneys – and others to help you get an up close, in person opportunity to talk to people.

**Grading:**

Role of a journalist	5%
City Profile	15%
Meeting article	10%
Police Story	10%
Court case article	10%
Education Case Study	5%
Congress Research	5%
WikiLeaks Case Study	5%

Final Project Outline	5%
Final Project Written/Presentation	25%
In-class exercises, participation, attendance	5%

**Grades:** You will be graded on your ability to turn in your assignments on deadline. They've got to be accurate, clear, use AP style correctly and must be fairly reported. All of the above components will be part of determining your grade.

Additionally, this course addresses each of the ACEJMC core competencies:

1. Understand and apply First Amendment principles and the law appropriate to professional practice;
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
3. Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications;
4. Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
5. Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
6. Think critically, creatively and independently;
7. Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
8. Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
9. Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
10. Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
11. Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**Department of Journalism statement on plagiarism**

Plagiarism, in a nutshell, is using other people's written words as your own. Some people consider the use of 7-10 words in a row, copied from another source, as plagiarism. Be sure to include citations when using other people's writing, because plagiarism is a serious offense in any discipline, especially in journalism. It's a firing offense in the professional world. In the Department of Journalism and Mayborn Graduate Institute of Journalism at UNT, students face a range of penalties for plagiarism (depending on the importance of the assignment):

- a grade of "F" on a minor assignment;
- a request that the student drop the class;
- withdrawal of the student from the class, initiated by the professor;
- an "F" in the course
- a referral to the UNT Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities;
- a notation on the student's transcript;
- and expulsion from the university.

A combination of these penalties may also be used. If you need more information or have questions about plagiarism, ask your nearest journalism professor or visit the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities.

**Saving your work:** You are responsible for making copies of all of your work thumb drives or by e-mailing finished assignments to yourself. You cannot save material on the computers in the lab. Save all graded copies of your work that have been returned to you, since this is the only way to resolve any potential discrepancy between the grade you are assigned and your own calculation of your grade.

**Email communication:** Communicating with students using the UNT student email account is part of the university's contract with students. Electronic communication with students in this class will be through the students' myunt accounts rather than personal email accounts.

### **Re-taking Failed Courses**

Students will not be allowed to automatically take a failed journalism course more than two times. Once you have failed a journalism course twice, you will not be allowed to enroll in that course for 12 months. Once you have waited 12 months after failing a course twice, you may make an appeal to the professor teaching the course to be allowed to enroll a third time.

### **Disability Accommodation**

*The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at [940.565.4323](tel:940.565.4323).*

### **Textbook policy**

The Mayborn School of Journalism doesn't require students to purchase textbooks from the University Bookstore. Many are available through other bookstores or online.

### **SETE**

The Student Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness (SETE) is a university-wide online evaluation and a requirement for all UNT classes. The Mayborn School of Journalism needs your input to improve our teaching and curriculum. This short survey will be available at the end of the semester, providing you a chance to comment on how this class is taught. Prompt completion of the SETE will mean earlier access to final semester grades. You're a critical part of our growth and success. We look forward to your input through SETE.

### **Academic Honesty**

When you submit work for this class, that is the same as making a statement that you have produced the work yourself, in its entirety. Plagiarism, fabrication, copyright infringement, and similar uses of other people's work are unacceptable.

Plagiarism, in a nutshell, is using other people's written words as your own. Some people consider the use of 7-10 words in a row, copied from another source, as plagiarism. Be sure to include citations when using other people's writing, because plagiarism is a serious offense in any discipline, especially in journalism. It is a firing offense in the professional world.

### **Mayborn School of Journalism Academic Integrity Policy**

The codes of ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, American Advertising Federation and Public Relations Society of America address truth and honesty. The Mayborn School of Journalism embraces these tenets and believes that academic dishonesty of any kind – including plagiarism and fabrication – is incongruent with all areas of journalism. The school's policy aligns with UNT Policy 18.1.16 and requires reporting any act of academic dishonesty to the Office for Academic Integrity for investigation. If the student has a previous confirmed offense (whether the first offense was in the journalism school or another university department) and the student is found to have committed another offense, the department will request the additional sanction of removing the student from the Mayborn

School of Journalism. The student may appeal to the Office for Academic Integrity, which ensures due process and allows the student to remain in class pending the appeal.

### **First Class Day Attendance**

Journalism instructors reserve the right to drop any student who does not attend the first class day of the semester.

## *Tentative Class Schedule (subject to change)*

### **WEEK 1 – AUGUST 29**

Introduction to class. What is public affairs? How much do you know about your government?

#### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next week:**

- Read Chapters 1 -4, Essentials of Journalism
- Essay on the role of the journalist
- **Min. 500 words on what is the role of the journalist. You must integrate specific examples/references from the reading.**
- Avoid using “I”, “I think”, “I believe” – write this as if it was going to be published on the Op-Ed page
- Your essay will be graded on the following rubric:
  - Ability to write clearly and in an organized manner
  - Proper use of grammar, punctuation and spelling
  - Direct references to the reading material. Footnotes are not required, but you should make in-text references to key themes you to support your argument.

### **WEEK 2 – SEPTEMBER 5**

What makes a journalist? What is civic journalism? Why it matters? Beat Assignments. Community profiles. Defining the components of a community. Sample community profiles.

#### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next week:**

- **READ: “Engaging Communities: Content and Conversation,” by Joy Mayer, Nieman Reports (Available on Blackboard Learn.)**
- **Read the following sections of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism website:**
  - **Nine Ideas for Strengthening Journalism:**  
<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/tcl/nineideas.html>
  - **Part 1: Harwood Civic Life Frameworks:**  
<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/tcl/part1.html> &
  - **Part 2: Tapping into Civic Life**  
<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/tcl/part2.html>
  - **Read ALL: Framework #1 to Framework #4: Layers of Civic Life**  
<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/tcl/framework1.html>

### **WEEK 3 – SEPTEMBER 12**

Covering meetings / Covering local government. Covering Local Government continued. Mapping your beat. Developing sources. Seven Knowledge keys. Engaging sources. Role of civic leaders.

#### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE next week:**

- **Write up to a 500-750 word story, double-spaced on the community/city your covering based on your readings on how to define a community.**
- Your story will be graded using the following rubric:
  - Direct quotes from interviews from local residents, business owners, city officials and/or other key people
  - Description of geography, demographics of the community, population, demographics, housing, education or other key indicators that help describe the community
  - Brief description of community's history
  - Ability to write clearly and in an organized manner
  - Proper use of grammar, punctuation and spelling

#### **WEEK 4 – SEPTEMBER 19**

Covering meetings / Covering local government. Covering Local Government continued. Mapping your beat. Developing sources. Seven Knowledge keys. Engaging sources. Role of civic leaders

##### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week:**

- Cover a local city council meeting or government related meeting.
- **Max. 500 words. Typed. Double-spaced. Include source list. A copy of the city council agenda and any other related documents that are relevant to the story.**

#### **WEEK 5 – SEPTEMBER 26**

Covering law enforcement. Crime beat basics. Key terms. Understanding the arrest process. What makes a good cop story? Understanding crime stats.

**Discussion of Final Project.**

##### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week :**

- Read “Step 3” in the Pew Center for Civic Journalism (<http://www.pewcenter.org/doingcj/pubs/tcl/step3.html>). Read the following chapter on the “Covering Crime and Justice” website, [http://www.justicejournalism.org/crimeguide/chapter01/chapter01\\_pg02.html#crimebeatbasics](http://www.justicejournalism.org/crimeguide/chapter01/chapter01_pg02.html#crimebeatbasics)
- **READ: Chapter 1** on “Covering Crime Beats” on the “Covering Crime and Justice” website, <http://justicejournalism.org>

#### **WEEK 6 – OCTOBER 3**

Covering law enforcement. Key terms. Developing sources. Writing compelling police stories. Discussion/review of sample police stories. Risks/problems in covering crime.

##### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week**

- Write a 500-word story police story. The story must include original reporting, interviews and quotes. Include a source list, and if it is based on an actual crime, include a print out of the police report. Be prepared to discuss.

#### **WEEK 7 – OCTOBER 10**

Covering courts & the legal process. Tips and strategies for covering courts. Writing good in-depth feature stories.

##### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week:**

- Read: “Covering Courts: The Associated Press Manual for Reporters,” <http://www.nypress.com/LegalFiles/intro.html>
- Go to Poynter Institute's NewU.org website: <http://www.newsu.org/courses/beat-covering-courts>
- Enroll for FREE to take the “On the Beat: Covering the Courts”

## **WEEK 8 – OCTOBER 17**

Covering courts. Continued. Review of key legal terms.

## **WEEK 9 – OCTOBER 24**

Covering Politics/Elections / Campaign Financing. Following the Money

### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week:**

- Write a 500-word story on trial at civic, criminal or federal court. The story must include original reporting, interviews and quotes. Include a source list, and if it is based on an actual crime, include a print out of the police report. Be prepared to discuss.
- **READ:** The ALL the chapters in the INTRODUCTION of the Database Journalism Handbook ( <http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/>)

## **WEEK 10 – OCTOBER 31**

The basics of investigative reporting. Accessing sources. **Familiarize yourself with the IRE database: IRE Net Tour at <http://ire.org>**

### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Week:**

- 500 word story on your assigned politician, including campaign finances, key themes; platform, etc.
- Final Project Outline Due.

### **READ:**

- Beginners Guide to Financial Statements: <http://sec.gov/investor/pubs/begfinstmtguide.htm>
- The following sections at <http://businessjournalism.org>:
  - Covering Business: An Introduction:  
<http://businessjournalism.org/2011/04/26/covering-business-an-introduction/>
  - Covering Business: Finding Local Stories  
<http://businessjournalism.org/2011/04/26/covering-business-finding-local-stories/>
  - Tips for Better Economics Stories - Part I: <http://sabew.org/2009/08/tips-for-better-economics-stories-i-ten-tips/>
  - Tips for Better Economics Stories - Part II: <http://sabew.org/2009/08/tips-for-better-economics-stories-ii-localize-your-coverage/>

## **WEEK 11 – NOVEMBER 7**

Business/Financial Reporting

Writing effective business stories. Finding information on public companies and non-profits.

### **>>>> HOMEWORK DUE Next Class:**

- Covering Education / L.A. Times Case Study Discussion. Read case and write at least a 300-word answer to your pre-assigned question. Post your answer on Blackboard by the end of class.
- Your answer to the question will be based on the following rubric:
  - Justification your answer with facts from the case study or additional research.
  - Footnotes are not required, but you should make in-text references to key themes you to support your argument.
  - Ability to write clearly and in an organized manner
  - Proper use of grammar, punctuation and spelling

## **WEEK 12 – NOVEMBER 14**

Public v. Private lives / Government & News Media / WikiLeaks / Snowden & the NSA

### **>>>> HOMEWORK Due Next Class:**

- **Read:** The “Friend or Foe?: WikiLeaks and the Guardian” case study posted on Blackboard.
  - Write at least a 300-word answer to your pre-assigned question. Post your answer on Blackboard by the end of class.
- Your answer to the question will be based on the following rubric:
  - Justification your answer with facts from the case study or additional research.
  - Footnotes are not required, but you should make in-text references to key themes you to support your argument.
  - Ability to write clearly and in an organized manner
  - Proper use of grammar, punctuation and spelling

**DUE:** FINAL Project Detailed Outline

## **WEEK 13 – NOVEMBER 21**

Government & News Media – Dissecting public documents. **Discuss Wikileaks**

**NOVEMBER 21<sup>st</sup>: FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOP –Bring OUTLINE or drafts of your stories for me to review.**

## **WEEK 14 – NOVEMBER 28**

**NOTE: No class Thanksgiving**

### **>>>> HOMEWORK Due Next Class:**

- Go to Poynter Institute's NewU.org website: <https://www.newsu.org/courses/handling-race-and-ethnicity>
- Log in and take the self-directed course on Handling Race and Ethnicity.

## **WEEK 15 – DECEMBER 5**

Discussion of diversity and news media. Final class presentations.

## **WEEK 16 – DECEMBER 12**

Final class presentations. Wrap up.