**JOUR 4530-004 (News Study Abroad) /**

**JOUR 5760-004 (International News and Media Study Abroad)**

**Cross-Cultural Reporting**

Summer 2025

Mayborn in Fukuoka, Japan

Through the University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, USA

**Instructor :** Prof. Alex Copeland

**Email:** alex.copeland@unt.edu

General class information, assignments, syllabus and readings are available on Canvas through learn.unt.edu. All assignments will be turned in through Canvas except your reflective writing blogs.

**Description**

In this course, we will explore cultural aspects of Japan through journalism. We will create multimedia stories, blogs and other media content to capture the lived experiences of local residents. Instruction includes lectures, discussions, readings, presentations, field trips, and writing. By the end of the class, students should have a multimedia story (text, photos, podcast, video, audio slideshow and/or other multimedia elements) that they have researched and produced.

**Statements of Student Learning Outcomes**

* Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the United States and Japan, 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.
* Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they will work.
* 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 history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
* Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications.
* Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
* Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
* Think critically, creatively and independently.
* Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.
* Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world.

**Email communication and class information**

Electronic communication with students in this class will be through the students’ my.unt.edu accounts rather than personal email accounts. All information for the class will be posted on Canvas at learn.unt.edu.

**Disability Accommodation**

The University of North Texas and the Mayborn School of Journalism make reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodations at any time. However, ODA notices of reasonable 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 reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For study-abroad courses, students requesting accommodations should notify their faculty leader as early as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Note that while the ADA does not extend beyond U.S. borders, and international accessibility requirements vary broadly from U.S. standards, UNT study-abroad programs will endeavor to provide accommodations wherever practicable. **Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable 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 UNT Office of Disability Access website at <https://disability.unt.edu/>. You may also contact ODA by phone at 940-565-4323.

**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.

**Attendance**

One absence in the course is the limit without penalty toward your final grade, unless you have an emergency or an illness. Coming to class late or leaving early may constitute an absence for that day. This is a seminar course, and it requires your attendance and participation each class meeting.

**Assignments and Course Work**

This course centers on two major assignments designed to challenge you as a reflective thinker and working journalist in an unfamiliar cultural setting: a personal blog and a multimedia journalism project. Both assignments are essential to your success in the course and to your development as a cross-cultural communicator.

**Exam**

This course includes one cumulative exam that assesses your understanding of key course themes, case studies, and field trip experiences. The goal is not to memorize facts, but to show your ability to apply cross-cultural reporting concepts and compare Japanese and U.S. journalism practices.

* Format: Open-note, open-book
* Questions: 50 (multiple-choice and short answer)
* Duration: 70 minutes
* Required: Bring your laptop and notes
* Date: TBD based on field schedule

The exam is a open-note and open-book and will cover field trips, lecture materials, and everything we’ve discussed in class. You will have 50 questions. They will be a blend of multiple-choice and short answer. You will have 70 minutes to complete. Reference notes taken in class. Bring your laptop.

**1. Personal Reflective Blog**

You will maintain a public-facing blog throughout the course. This blog is your reflective field journal—a record of your experiences, your challenges, and your growth as a journalist navigating Japan’s culture, media, and society.

* Platform: Choose your own platform (e.g., Wordpress, Medium, Adobe Spark) and submit your blog URL to the instructor before departure, by Friday, May 23. Test your link before submitting it.
* Tone & Audience: Write for a general public audience. Consider that your classmates, instructors, and future employers may read this blog. Write thoughtfully and professionally.
* Content & Format: Each post should be 300–500 words and include at least one multimedia element weekly (photo, video, infographic, or audio). Posts should reflect your evolving insights, connect to course themes, and demonstrate cultural sensitivity.
* Schedule: You will publish two posts per week—one in response to an assigned prompt and one on a topic of your choosing. Posts are due by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. JST.
* Final Blog Compilation Due: Thursday, June 26, including revised posts and a short introduction reflecting on your overall experience.

**Cross-Cultural Blog Post Rubric**  
Each post is worth 10 points. Two posts per week = 20 points/week.

| Criteria | Excellent (10–9) | Good (8–7) | Fair (6–5) | Needs Work (4 or below) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Clarity & Structure** | Writing is clear, well-organized, and engaging. Ideas flow logically. | Mostly clear and organized. Minor issues with structure or coherence. | Some sections are unclear or poorly organized. | Disorganized or confusing. Difficult to follow. |
| **Insight & Reflection** | Deep reflection on cultural experience. Shows curiosity, nuance, and growth. | Thoughtful reflection with some depth and self-awareness. | Basic reflection; limited analysis of experience. | Superficial or vague. Little insight into cultural experience. |
| **Cultural Awareness** | Demonstrates strong cultural sensitivity and specific, well-contextualized observations. | Shows awareness of cultural differences; a few thoughtful examples. | Generalized or stereotypical observations. Limited cultural analysis. | Lacks cultural insight or relies on assumptions. |
| **Multimedia Integration** | Blog includes relevant, well-captioned multimedia (photo, video, audio, etc.) | Multimedia is included and mostly relevant. | Multimedia included but poorly integrated or lacks relevance. | No multimedia included, or it feels unrelated. |
| **Style & Mechanics** | Strong voice, free of grammar/AP style errors. Professionally presented. | Minor grammar or style errors. Writing is mostly polished. | Several grammar or style issues. Some awkward or unprofessional phrasing. | Frequent errors. Writing appears rushed or careless. |

**Bonus (+1)**: Links to external sources, quotes from locals or peers, original reporting, or creative risk-taking  
**Penalty (-1 to -2)**: Missed deadline, incorrect format, or lack of attribution for outside sources

**2. Reported Journalism Project**

Your major reporting assignment is a reported story exploring a cultural topic, issue, or experience rooted in your time in Japan. This story should reflect original reporting, thoughtful structure, and journalistic rigor.

* Format Options: Your project may take the form of a short video (3–5 minutes), podcast (5–8 minutes), photo essay with captions, longform text story (1,000–1,500 words), or a hybrid format. You are encouraged to experiment with form while maintaining strong journalistic standards.
* Topic Approval: Choose a culturally relevant topic and pitch it by April 30. Subject to professor approval.
* Reporting Requirements: Your story must include at least three original sources, including interviews, documents, or site-based observations. You are expected to follow professional standards for attribution, fairness, and accuracy.
* Ethical & Stylistic Guidelines: Follow the SPJ Code of Ethics and use AP style unless otherwise appropriate for your format. Identify yourself clearly as a student journalist during interviews or data collection.
* Teamwork: You must complete the project individually.
* Final Project Due: Week 5. Late submissions will lose one full letter grade per day unless a formal extension is granted in advance.

**Assignment Weights:**

* Blog (weekly posts and final compilation): 30%
* Story project: 50%
* Participation (class discussion, initiative, engagement): 20%

**Weekly Blog Prompts and Themes**

Each week, you will complete two blog posts—one assigned and one on a topic of your choice. The assigned prompts are listed below to guide your reflections and reporting:

**Week 1: First Impressions**

Prompt: What are your initial perceptions of Japanese society in Tokyo? How is it different from home? Use specific examples to explore your cultural observations and first encounters.

**Week 2: Media Systems in Context**

Prompt: What did you learn from visits to Japanese media organizations? How do practices, ethics, and workplace culture compare to what you’ve experienced or learned in the U.S.?

**Week 3: Cultural Navigation**

Prompt: Now that you’ve spent time living in Japan, what advice would you offer to a future student visiting here? Write a cultural survival guide based on your own experiences.

**Week 4: Cross-Cultural Consumption**

Prompt: Choose a consumer product, media artifact, or cultural item with presence in both the U.S. and Japan. Analyze its significance, availability, and symbolic value in both places.

**Week 5: Reflection and Return**

Prompt: What will you take away from your experience in Japan? How has your understanding of culture, journalism, or yourself changed?

For your second post each week, choose a moment, image, conversation, or theme that feels meaningful to you. Use that space to document, interpret, and reflect.

**Guidelines for reporting a multimedia story:**

Your multimedia story about a cultural aspect of Japan can be a video story, photo essay, text story, podcast or a combination of these. You should follow journalistic guidelines for this story: a compelling story told through excellent research, factual information attributed to sources, interviews/observations/interactions and a strong narrative. You should include at least three outside sources for this story. You story should follow the SPJ Code of Ethics (https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp) and Associated Press style. You should always introduce yourself as a journalist when conducting interviews and research for this story. If you are not a journalism student or have not had many journalism classes, we will be covering journalistic principles and storytelling techniques in class. You also might consider partnering with another student who has journalism experience.

**Grades**

Your grade for this class will be based on the following:

* Participation: 20%
* Blog: 30%
* Multimedia project: 50%

Syllabus (Subject to change; all changes will be announced in advance; some field trips will be announced on site instead of in this syllabus):

**Fieldwork Ethics**

As student journalists working abroad, you are expected to conduct yourselves with professionalism and cultural sensitivity at all times. This includes identifying yourself as a reporter, obtaining informed consent before recording or photographing individuals, and respecting privacy and local norms. When in doubt, ask before acting—and debrief ethical concerns with your instructor during office hours or class discussions.

**Week 1**

Tokyo media visits.

Field trips include:

* + The Asahi Shimbun newspaper
  + Kyodo PR
  + Japan National Press Club
  + Edelman Japanese
  + Bloomberg Japanese
  + Kyodo News Agency
  + Jarman International KK

Blogging

Begin writing your blog this week and start to promote it. Blog posts should present an overview of the sites we visit and observations about Japanese media. Detailed notes will be of high importance in your preparation.

**Week 2**

Introduction to Japanese culture and media. Overview of journalistic practices and reporting techniques and strategy.

Blogging

To read and discuss this week:

READ online overview of Japan and the Japanese Media System from the BBC: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14918801. Link also is on Canvas. (Click on ALL tabs, including Overview, Facts, Leaders, Media, Timeline and In Pictures.)

Read article, McCargo, D. “The Political Role of the Japanese Media,” posted on Canvas.

Choose topic for reporting project and begin research on the topic.

**Week 3**

Blogging

Work on reporting projects. Meet with professor for guidance and updates.

Twitter scavenger hunt in Fukuoka.

**Week 4**

Blogging

Work on reporting projects. Meet with professor for guidance and updates.

**Week 5**

Blogging

Presentations of reporting projects

**FINAL PROJECT DUE** Thursday, June 27

**FINAL BLOG DUE** Thursday, June 27