

**Bergen Community College  
Division of Arts and Humanities  
Department of Communication**

**Syllabus  
COM 201  
Introduction to Journalism**

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**Instructor:**

**Office:**

**Office hours:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

**Catalog Course Description** [<top>](#)

This course is a study of the fundamentals of reporting with emphasis on the modern news story. Elements of news style, structure of news stories, news sources, ethics, and the mechanics of newspaper production are considered.

**Prerequisite:** WRT-101 with a minimum grade of C

**Course Objectives** [<top>](#)

This course is the foundation skills course. Its primary purposes are to sharpen your news judgment and to improve your skills as a reporter, writer and editor. The skills you learn here form the cornerstone upon which all other journalistic skills will be built. The goal is to give you a solid foundation in the basics of journalism. The tasks of reporter, writer and editor draw on many mental processes and skills:

- Observation.
- Interviewing.
- Analysis.
- Attention to detail.
- Ability to judge accuracy and fairness.

**Student Learning Objectives** [<top>](#)

During this course, you will:

- Develop the ability to write clear, concise, accurate and interesting news stories
- Demonstrate basic skills and techniques in newsgathering and newswriting
- Judge the newsworthiness of events and ideas and analyze stories for content, form and style
- Gain a wide range of practical experience in basic news coverage
- Demonstrate an understanding of major legal and ethical issues in journalism
- Develop style through writing, revision and editing

**Required Texts:** [<top>](#)

- The Missouri Group, *News Reporting and Writing*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Bedford-St. Martin 2014.
- Deborah Potter, *Handbook of Independent Journalism*, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, 2006.
- The Associated Press, *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, 2015 edition.
- The New York Times, print or [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com);
- The Record, print or [www.northjersey.com](http://www.northjersey.com);
- The Star-Ledger, print or [www.nj.com](http://www.nj.com); [www.cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com); and other online news sources.

The Potter *Handbook* will be distributed in class. The Missouri text and the *AP Stylebook* are available in the bookstore and also online at reduced rates. You may buy an older edition of either book, but be aware that the quiz questions will be based on the latest edition.

**Suggested Reading:** [<top>](#)

- *America's Best Newspaper Writing*, Roy Peter Clark and Christopher Scanlan, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006
- *The Elements of Journalism*, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, Three Rivers Press, 2001.
- *Talk Straight, Listen Carefully: The Art of Interviewing*, M.L. Stein and Susan E. Paterno, Iowa State University Press, 2001
- *Math Tools for Journalists*, Kathleen Woodruff Wickham, Marion Street Press, Inc., 2002
- *On Writing Well*, 30th Anniversary Issue" William Zinsser, Collins, 2006
- *News Reporting and Writing, 12<sup>th</sup> Ed.*, Melvin Mencher, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2010.

**Course procedures** [<top>](#)

*Reporting/Writing.* You will be reporting, writing or editing, and revising stories virtually every week of the semester.

*Team learning.* Occasionally you will work with other students to evaluate and suggest improvements in the first drafts of your stories or to brainstorm story ideas and to plan coverage. Journalism is an increasingly collaborative effort among writers, editors, designers, directors and producers. We will practice working together as a group of mutually supportive journalists with high standards for one another's work.

*Quizzes.* There will be quizzes of three different kinds:

1. News quizzes designed to show your understanding of major news events of the preceding week. Journalists are expected to follow the news, including regional, state, national, international, business, entertainment and sports news.
2. AP style quizzes. The AP Stylebook is the "bible" of the news industry. Working journalists must have a firm understanding of and familiarity with AP style.
3. Quizzes and exercises based on the textbook and lectures. These quizzes will confirm your understanding of the readings and the materials covered in class.

*Computers.* This is a hybrid course, using Moodle. (See section on Moodle.) All quizzes and exercises will be done online. All written assignments will be submitted via Moodle. You **MUST** have ready access to an off-campus computer to take this class. You are also required to bring a jump (flash, thumb, etc.) drive to every face-to-face class.

## **Classroom Policies** <top>

### *Class Attendance*

From the college's attendance policy: "All students are expected to attend punctually every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance and lateness policies and sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of each course. These will be established in writing on the individual course outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes."

Because so much of what we will do in this course requires your participation, your consistent presence is required, particularly since we will be meeting face-to-face only once a week. Studies show that students learn as much from one another as they do from their instructor. Since your absence could affect someone else's learning, you must be in class. Each student is permitted two absences. Each absence in excess of two will result in a loss of 10 percent of the class participation grade.

### *Tardiness*

Persistent tardiness will result in a loss of all class participation points assigned by the instructor.

### *Cell phones*

Cell phones must be off or set to vibrate on incoming calls. Initiating calls, texting or sending tweets during class is rude and hinders your and your classmates' attention, and is thus not permitted. Violation of this policy will result in cell phone confiscation.

## **Moodle** <top>

COM 201HY is a *hybrid* class. We will meet only once a week; all other work will be done online. This means you must learn to use Moodle. Through Moodle, you will turn in assignments, communicate with class members and me, take exams and receive all important announcements regarding the class. In choosing to remain in this class, you agree to the following:

1. You will check Moodle daily for information regarding the class.
2. All communication between instructor and students will be through Moodle.
3. Unless otherwise stipulated by me, all quizzes and exams will be given via Moodle. All exams will have a specific time limit.
4. You will keep Moodle deadlines. In the event that you have technical difficulties, **you are required to have an alternative means of accessing Moodle**
5. Unless otherwise specified, all written assignments should be turned in through Moodle.
6. *Time Management* is critical in your use of Moodle. If an assignment is available for a week, technical problems during the last 10 hours before an assignment or a test is due will not be a strong reason to extend the deadline.
7. Problems with course content on Moodle will be addressed by me. Please do not hesitate to call or text me if there is a question.
8. Problems with Moodle administration (password, logging in, technical issues) will be addressed by BCC's Service Desk at 877-612-5381
9. To access the site, go to <http://moodle.bergen.edu> or the Bergen Portal and fill in your user name (your Webadvisor ID) and password (up to eight letters of your last name, first letter capitalized, and last four digits of your BCC ID number).

## **Communication** <top>

This is a hybrid course, meaning we will meet only once a week. All the rest of our work, including communicating with one another and with me, will be online. Here's how we will stay in touch with one another, and how you can contact me, when we aren't in class:

- *Virtual Office Hours*: I'll be in my office three days a week for office hours as shown at the top of this document; feel free to drop in. I'll also be available on Moodle if you want to use the "Chat"

function. (Click the "Chat" link at the top of the course page or on the right under "Upcoming Events" and post your question, problem, etc.)

- *Contacting me:* I'll be checking my BCC e-mail daily (you should too) during the work week (Monday-Thursday) and occasionally Friday-Sunday. I'll get back to you within 24 hours during the week, but don't hesitate to contact me at any time in an emergency
- *Forums:* We will have online forum discussions on important topics. You are expected to post to all forum topics, using proper English sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Your postings will receive a grade.
- *Netiquette:* Basic rules for online communication include -
  - Be respectful -- use the words and tone you'd use in a face-to-face conversation.
  - Keep your responses to e-mails and posts on topic. If it's a new topic, start a new discussion or message.
  - Reply substantially and add to the discussion -- don't just say, "that's right" or "I agree."
  - Avoid jargon and Web-talk, such as IMHO and BTW.

### **Written Work** <top>

All written assignments must meet college-level standards and conform to AP style. Pages should be formatted with one-inch margins, double spaced with a standard 12 point font (use a formal font such as Times Roman or Arial). **A spelling check and grammar check is expected before you submit your assignment.** Grammar and spelling will be taken into consideration in the evaluation. All written assignments must be submitted through Moodle.

**All assignments MUST be submitted as either MS Word documents (with a .doc extension) or as Rich Text File (with an .rtf extension) documents.** If you upload a document that I cannot read, the assignment will be deleted from Moodle, the assignment will be considered as "late" and you will need to resubmit it in the proper format if you want partial credit for it.

### **Late Assignments** <top>

Assignments are expected on the day that they are due. For every day an assignment is late, the grade will be reduced by 10% until the fourth day. After the fifth day, the assignment will receive a "0." If a written assignment is late, the student will receive only a grade without comments. A grade for a late assignment cannot be appealed.

### **Students with disabilities** <top>

It is the policy of Bergen Community College to provide equal access to employment and educational programs, benefits, and services to any qualified individual, without regard to disability. Individuals with disabilities are responsible for reporting and supplying documentation verifying their disability. Requests for accommodations must be initiated through the Office of Specialized Services, Room L-116, Pitkin Education Center (<http://www.bergen.edu/pages/676.asp>).

### **Safeguards** <top>

It's always better to be *prepared* for disaster rather than *surprised* by it. **YOU MUST KEEP BACKUP COPIES OF ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS.** In the event that an assignment is lost, you must produce the backup in order to get credit for the assignment.

### **Plagiarism**

College policy is clear that copying another person's work, downloading without documenting sources and/or using another's ideas as if they were your own are serious violations. If discovered, plagiarism will result in your failure of that assignment and can lead to failure of the course and your suspension from the college. **All assignments will be checked with plagiarism-detecting software (Turnitin.com).** It's serious. Don't do it. If you are unsure about this policy, check out <http://www.bergen.edu/pages/2307.asp> and [http://wps.prenhall.com/hss\\_understand\\_plagiarism\\_1/](http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_understand_plagiarism_1/)

**Important Dates: Keep these in mind <top>**

- Jan. 23 Last day for drop/add; last day to receive 100% refund
- Jan. 30 Last day to receive 50% refund
- Feb. 6 Last day to receive 25% refund
- Feb. 7 Last day to request Audit Status
- Mar. 13-17 Spring break, college closed
- Apr. 18 Official Withdrawal Deadline
- May 9 Classes End (*our last class is May 3*)

**Pay attention to your health; watch out for stress <top>**

The American College Health Association reports that stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, relationship/family problems, loss, alcohol/drug use are among the top 10 health reasons why students perform poorly in College. If you or a friend is in distress, consider contacting a Personal Counselor for a confidential, free appointment. They can be reached in either HS-100 (201-447-9257) or in A-118 (201-447-7211), or [personalcounseling@bergen.edu](mailto:personalcounseling@bergen.edu) (for non emergency matters). Counseling is confidential and free.

**Student and Faculty Support Services <top>****The Henry and Edith Cerullo Learning Assistance Center**

The Tutoring Center, English Language Resource Center, and Writing Center are collectively known as the Henry and Edith Cerullo Learning Assistance Center. The Cerullo Learning Assistance Center is located in the Pitkin Education Center, Room L-125; the telephone number is 201-447-7489.

**The Tutorial Center**

The Tutoring Center, staffed with peer and professional tutors, offers free individual and group tutoring, supplemental instruction, and online tutoring for subjects offered at the college.

**The English Language Resource Center** is located in Ender Hall, Room 126, and provides help to students whose native language is not English.

**Writing Center**

The Writing Center, located in the Learning Assistance Center (L-125), is designed to help students improve their writing. Individualized tutorials in all facets of the writing process including the development of ideas, organization, editing and proofreading are available to all students enrolled in college-level courses. Many Writing Center resources are also available online at <http://www.bergen.edu/pages1/Pages/1795.aspx>

**Sydney Silverman Library**

This course will take full advantage of the Sidney Silverman Library (2<sup>nd</sup> level, Pitkin Education Center), and at least one class session will be held there. The library is an important resource for information, study and intellectual enrichment, is an integral part of the College's educational programs. To support the curriculum, the library acquires, organizes, and provides access to a variety of print, media, and electronic resources for individual and classroom use. The library is open seven days a week during the fall and spring semesters, and weekdays during the summer.

## **GRADING** <top>

Your grade will be based on accumulation of points for work accomplished through a combination of quiz and exercise results, class participation and written work, as follows:

### **Quizzes and exercises (up to 200 points)**

These include news quizzes about current news events in various categories, including national, international, entertainment, business, sports and others, plus quizzes on course content from the lectures, textbook and the AP Stylebook.

### **Written Work (up to 600 points)**

- Written assignments will be evaluated with respect to both the *content* and *quality* of the work. Content includes proper sourcing, use of quotes, accuracy, fairness and completeness of the story. Quality includes clarity, coherence, unity, grammar, spelling and adherence to journalistic standards.
- Writing assignments will be graded based on their “publishability” as follows:
  - (A): Publishable with few or no changes required; outstanding effort.
  - (B): Publishable with some changes required; very good effort
  - (C): Publishable with significant changes required; average effort
  - (D): Publishable, but major surgery required; barely passable effort
  - (F): Unpublishable. Assignment not fulfilled, work not turned in or unacceptably poor work.
- Most assignments are worth 25 points, while others, such as the Observation assignment, are worth 50. Pay attention to the points allocated to each assignment. And note that the final exercise, two assignments based on an in-class online coverage exercise, involves one deadline-based, in-class story and an out-of-class story worth a total of 150 points.
- A tip: use spell check, but do NOT depend on it totally for proper grammar and spelling. For example, spell-check can’t tell whether “their” or “there” is correct usage in the context of a story.

### **Class participation (up to 200 points)**

- Since we will meet only once a week, this portion of your grade will be based on your input during class (being in class but mute isn’t participating) and contributing to online forums.

**Note:** Written work is based on available in- and out-of-class assignments and field trips. If the total potential points fall short of the maximum number, grading will be proportional based on the number of points earned versus the total potential points. Grades are assigned based on the percentage of possible points achieved, thusly:

- A 90% - 100%
- B+ 85% - 89.9%
- B 80% - 84.9%
- C+ 75% - 79.9%
- C 70% - 74.9%
- D 65% - 69.9%
- F 0% - 64.9%

**Tentative Class Schedule [<top>](#)**  
**(subject to change)**  
**COM 201.001HY**

Week	Topic	Readings
1	Course introduction; Role of journalism in society	Syllabus review, Moodle introduction & assignments
2	The reporter at work: What is news?	Journalism Handbook Ch. 1; Missouri News Reporting and Writing Ch. 1-3. AP Stylebook introduction
3	Sourcing and interviewing: Gathering information, protecting sources	Handbook Ch. 2; Missouri NRW Ch. 4 - 5
4	Elements of basic news stories; The art and power of observation	Missouri NRW Ch. 10; Poynter Institute and MIT.edu online links.
5	Researching: From the Internet to libraries, social media	Missouri NRW Ch. 6
6	Other story forms: Alternatives to the inverted pyramid	Missouri NRW Ch. 11
7	Laws and ethics: Legal protections, ethical and legal obligations	Handbook Ch. 7; Missouri NRW Ch. 21; AP Stylebook "Briefing on Media Law"
8	The morality of Journalism; recognizing and avoiding bias	Missouri NRW Ch. 22, AP Stylebook section on religion
9	SPRING BREAK	COLLEGE CLOSED
10	Writing news for different media platforms: online and print (profiles)	Handbook Ch. 5, Missouri NRW Ch. 12, AP Stylebook section on social media guidelines
11	Writing news for different media platforms: broadcast	Handbook Ch. 5, Missouri NRW Ch. 13, AP Stylebook section on broadcast guidelines
12	Covering beats: Cops, courts, crime and other local stories	Handbook Ch. 6, Missouri NRW Ch. 16-17
13	Covering beats: Education, business and consumer news	Handbook Ch. 6, Missouri NRW Ch. 17
14	Covering breaking news, speeches, meetings and news conferences	Missouri NRW Ch. 15
15	Final online coverage exercise	Interactive online coverage simulation
16	Course and final exercise review	