Instructor: Amy Merrick  
Class Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00-2:30 p.m., McGaw 145  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:45-4:30 p.m., Lincoln Park, SAC 572B; Thursdays, Loop, TK  
Telephone: 773-580-5781 (cell)  
Email: amerrick1@depaul.edu  
Twitter: @amyjmerrick. I use my Twitter feed to post interesting stories, industry news, and internship and job opportunities in journalism.

Course Description:

The ways we get our news are rapidly changing—and the demands on reporters are changing with them. What haven’t changed are the fundamental skills necessary for any journalist: thorough and accurate reporting, clear writing, and an understanding of one’s responsibilities to colleagues and to an audience. Introduction to Journalism teaches students the foundational techniques they need to succeed in a field where solid reporting and writing still matter most.

Course Objectives:

This course will provide groundwork in reporting, news writing and news judgment through assignments in class and in the field. The purpose of this course is to help you think critically about current events and to report and write accurately, gracefully and intelligently.

By completing this course, you will learn to:

- Find story ideas and evaluate their news values
- Develop a plan for reporting and gather information
- Distinguish fact from opinion in a news story
- Interview people; choose and format quotes
- Understand the role of social media in reporting and publishing
- Write clear, accurate leads
- Organize and write the body of a news story
- Practice reporting and writing under deadline pressure
- Revise and fact-check stories
- Understand the ethical standards and social responsibilities of journalists
Required Texts:

- *The Responsible Reporter*, Bruce Evensen
- *Watch Your Words*, Marda Dunsky

**An important note on the syllabus:** Journalists never know how breaking news will affect the workday, so students are expected to be flexible. There may be times when we deviate from our syllabus to cover news affecting DePaul or Chicago.

**Current Events**

The best way to learn about journalism is to read, watch and listen. You will be expected to keep up with the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times*, as well as be aware of the major stories published by *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and CNN.com. Throughout the quarter, we will have periodic current-events quizzes or discussions.

**Class Guidelines:**

**Filing stories:** Most assignments will be filed through Dropbox. The Dropbox folder closes at the beginning of class.

**All class participants are expected to treat one another with respect.**

**Missing deadlines** will lower your grade one level (full grade A to B; B to C, etc.) for each class period an assignment is late. Working journalists do not have the flexibility to turn in stories late.

Makeup or missed assignments will be permitted only if you are absent because of a medical reason or similar verifiable circumstances. If illness forces you to miss a class, notify me in advance by email or cell, not after the fact. I will take attendance at the start of each class.

All missed work must be made up. If you are sick on a day when assignments are due, it is your responsibility to get them turned in, to get class notes from a classmate and/or to meet with me during office hours to get caught up.

**Academic integrity:** Cheating will not be tolerated. Fabricating information, making up sources and plagiarism are cheating. As we will discuss during the quarter, these offenses have ended the careers of professional reporters. Anyone caught cheating will be assigned a failing grade for the class, no questions asked.
Whenever you interview a source for this class, you must make it clear that you are a DePaul student. **You must supply contact information (name, address, phone, e-mail) for anyone you interview for a story.**

**Accommodations:** Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will be confidential. To ensure that you receive the most reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week or two). Also, be sure to contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) for support and additional services: #370, Student Center, Lincoln Park Campus, 773-325-1677.

**Sexual harassment:** This class will faithfully follow university guidelines on sexual harassment. Such behavior will not be tolerated and may lead to dismissal from the university.

**Please turn off cell phones and mobile devices during class.** No calls, texting, emailing or Web surfing during class. Doing these things will hurt your grade. If you have an urgent situation, please step into the hall to call or text.

**Food and drink are permitted during class.** Please keep it away from computers and keep the lab room neat.

**Grade Components:**

10%: Attendance, class contributions and willingness to work with an editor.

25%: Take-home AP style, leads, grammar, punctuation and other assignments.

40%: News stories, ethics assignment, and other projects throughout the quarter. **Note:** You will be allowed to rewrite at least one of these assignments to improve the grade.

25%: Final project

**Grading criteria:** Journalism is a hands-on activity. We learn as we go, improving our reporting and writing skills each time we tackle a new story. Therefore, I will give more weight to grades received later in the quarter in assessing your final grade.

An “A” means the student has mastered the key objectives of the assignment and could do this work successfully in an entry-level market. No factual errors. An “A” for the quarter means the student has mastered the basic skills required for feature writing and is ready for professional work in this area.

A “B” indicates substantial progress in understanding the assignment, but the student has additional, basic work to do before mastering the techniques being assessed. A grade of “B” for the quarter means the student is competent in the basic skills required for feature writing and has more work to do to be qualified for an entry-level position.
A “C” means there are several important issues the student needs to work on to achieve competence in the assignment. A grade of “C” for the quarter means the student has more work to do to demonstrate the basic skills required for feature writing.

A “D” indicates substantial problems with the assignment. Students who receive a “D” are strongly encouraged to make an appointment to discuss the assignment. A grade of “D” for the quarter typically indicates missed assignments have heavily impacted a grade and may mean that a significant number of assignments had substantial problems.

An “F” indicates a missed assignment or evidence that the student has made no effort to meet the basic requirements of the assignment (e.g. no interview conducted). Students who receive an “F” for reasons other than a missed assignment must make an appointment to discuss the assignment. An “F” for the quarter indicates a failure to meet minimum course requirements and is generally given in cases of chronic absences or missed assignments.

Accuracy: Misspelled names and other factual errors will hurt your grade on assignments.

Sources: Sources must meet the standards of major metro or national websites or newspapers. No family members, significant others or other class members. **Turn in all notes with your stories and include phone numbers for your sources.** I will be spot-checking this information throughout the quarter by occasionally contacting your sources.

We will follow DePaul’s grading scale to determine all assignment and final course grades.

A = 100 percent to 93 percent
A- = 90 to 92
B+ = 87 to 89
B = 83 to 86
B- = 80 to 82
C+ = 77 to 79
C = 73 to 76
C- = 70 to 72
D+ = 67 to 69
Weekly Topics and Assignments

Week 1

Tuesday, Jan. 7

Course introduction
Review syllabus
Format for filing news stories
Journalism terms
Making the switch: News consumer to news reporter

Assignments for Thursday, Jan. 9: Write 200 words (your only first-person story this quarter) answering this question: Why are you studying journalism? What does journalism mean to you?

Thursday, Jan. 9

Journalism encourages democracy.
What is journalism? How did we develop the current model?
What makes a good story? Where do you get your news? How is a newsroom set up?
The Five W’s and Two H’s of journalism

Assignment for Tuesday, Jan. 14: Read The Responsible Reporter Ch. 1 “What’s New in the News?,” Ch. 2 “A History of Responsible Reporting,” and Ch. 9 “Writing the Lead.”

Read print newspapers to find two examples of good leads and two examples of bad leads. Cut and paste the first few paragraphs of the story on a sheet of paper and cite why you liked the lead or didn’t. Also: Underline and label the who, what, when, where, why, how and how much questions answered in the opening paragraphs. You’ll hand this in after our discussion on Tuesday.

Week 2

Tuesday, Jan. 14

Generating ideas
Where do reporters get their stories?

Lead writing
Review news leads and basic inverted pyramid story structure.
We will go over the leads you brought in for examples. Be prepared to defend why you liked or didn’t like each lead.

Assignment for Thursday, Jan. 16: Read The Responsible Reporter Ch. 5 “Going Online” and Ch. 10 “Writing a Newspaper Story.” Read Marian Wang, “Course Load: The Growing Burden

**Thursday, Jan. 16**

**Journalism identifies problems.**
Hard news and investigative reporting

**Newsgathering resources.**
Interviews, personal observation, third-party sources, social media and the importance of accuracy and fairness/balance in reporting.

**Assignments for Tuesday, Jan. 21:** Take-home Lead Writing I assignments. Read the December and January dispatches from Paul Salopek’s “Out of Eden Walk,” [http://outofedenwalk.nationalgeographic.com/](http://outofedenwalk.nationalgeographic.com/).

Review the following entries in the *AP Stylebook* and **bring your stylebook to class:**

- “What’s New” (front of book)
- Abbreviations and acronyms
- Addresses
- Ages
- Datelines (also applies to cities)
- Dimensions
- Numerals
- Social media guidelines
- State names
- Times

**Week 3**

**Tuesday, Jan. 21**

**Journalism opens up the world.**
Global reporting

**Introduction to AP Style.**

**Pitching a story idea to an editor.** How to write a story budget summary. What gets your story on the front page of a newspaper or top of a website?

**Assignments for Thursday, Jan. 23:** AP Stylebook I take-home assignment. Read *The Responsible Reporter* Ch. 4 “Sourcing and Interviewing.”
Thursday, Jan. 23

The art of interviewing: Preparing for interviews, asking tough questions, in-person vs. phone vs. email interviews, handling quotes and correcting grammar in quotes.

Introduction of the “Person on the Street” interview assignment, due at the start of class on Tuesday, Feb. 11.


Week 4

Tuesday, Jan. 28

Story structure: What keeps a reader moving through a story?

Punctuation. What people tend to get wrong, and how to fix it.

Introduction of the final project.

Assignment for Thursday, Jan. 30: Punctuation 1 take-home assignment. Read The Responsible Reporter Ch. 8 “Covering Speeches and Press Conferences.” Review the following entries in the AP Stylebook:

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<th>Internet</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military titles/terms</td>
<td>Months</td>
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<tr>
<td>That</td>
<td>Time element</td>
</tr>
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<td>Religious titles</td>
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</tbody>
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Thursday, Jan. 30

Covering speeches and meetings. Backgrounding a speaker and finding a theme in a speech. Research and preparation for a meeting.

Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 4: AP Stylebook II take-home assignment. Reporting for your final project.

Week 5

Tuesday, Feb. 4

Covering a speech

Assignment for Thursday, Feb. 6: Short story on speaker.
Thursday, Feb. 6

News-judgment standards
Writing headlines
Assembling a newspaper or online news site

Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 11: “Person on the Street” interview story due at the start of class.

Week 6

Tuesday, Feb. 11

Watch: “The Newsroom” in class. We’ll do a short, written assignment analyzing the ethical issues raised. Reminder: Attendance and participation grades will be counted for this day.

Assignment for Thursday, Feb. 13: Read the Grammar and Usage handouts.

For your final project, draft two story idea “budget lines” following the class examples. I must approve your story idea.

Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 18: Written assignment on “The Newsroom.”

Thursday, Feb. 13

Graceful writing. What makes a story read smoothly? Spotting your own weaknesses and learning to fix them.

Grammar and Usage for Journalists discussion.

Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 18: Make sure to get your final project topic approved.

Written assignment on “The Newsroom.”

Read The Responsible Reporter Ch. 7 “Beat Reporting and Community News.” Read the police department entry in the AP Stylebook.
Week 7

Tuesday, Feb. 18

*Deadline for having your final project topic approved.*

**Journalism provides critical information.**
Breaking news stories
Police, weather, obituaries.

**Assignment for Thursday, Feb. 20:** Prepare for courthouse tour and story.

Thursday, Feb. 20

**NOTE TIME AND LOCATION! *NO CELL PHONES!***

**Tour of Cook County Criminal Court, 10 a.m.-12:30 p.m., 26th and California.**

**Assignment for Tuesday, Feb. 25:** News story based on courthouse visit.

Week 8

Tuesday, Feb. 25

**Libel discussion:** Libel issues, protections and malice. Libel and ethics in the digital age. Shield laws. Who is a public figure and who isn’t.

**Assignment for Thursday, Feb. 27:** Libel take-home assignment. Read *The Responsible Reporter* Ch. 13 “Feature Writing.” Read Charles Butler, “A Second Life,”

Thursday, Feb. 27

**Journalism helps people share their stories.**
Writing great features and profiles

**Assignment for Tuesday, March 4:** AP Stylebook 3 assignment (using the entire book). Continue reporting final project.
Week 9

Tuesday, March 4

Working in a newsroom

Assignment for Thursday, March 6: Read *The Responsible Reporter* Ch. 3 “The Digital World and Responsible Reporting.”

Read the following stories about the Boston Marathon bombing and come prepared to discuss in class:


http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2013/07/17/boston_bomber_rolling_stone_cover_with_dzokhar_tsarnaev_is_good_journalism.html

http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702303309504579181702252120052

Thursday, March 6

Ethics and libel 2. Discussion of the Boston Marathon coverage.

Law, fairness and public records.

Assignments for Tuesday, March 11: Read *The Responsible Reporter* Ch. 6 “Assembling an Online Story” and Ch. 12 “Writing and Reporting Television News.” Handout on starting a blog.

Look at these online stories and come ready to discuss their techniques on Tuesday:

Indiana Daily Student: Suspended Justice
http://www.idsdavidcamm.com

New York Times: For Nobel, They Can Thank the “God Particle” and What Is the Higgs?

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/10/08/science/the-higgs-boson.html#/g=true
Week 10

Tuesday, March 11

Online storytelling, copyright law and blogging basics.
Set up blogs in class

Assignment for Thursday, March 13: Rewrite one assignment from the quarter. Continue reporting and writing drafts of final project.

Thursday, March 13

Work on final projects. Deadline for rewriting one assignment from the quarter.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD

Thursday, March 20, 11:45 a.m.—2 p.m.

Final projects due at the start of class. You will not receive time to work on your story during this class meeting. Each student will spend five minutes discussing his or her story; topics may include new skills learned, interesting details that emerged during reporting, any particular challenges, story structure, and/or how the story might be expanded into a longer feature article. Attendance at this class is mandatory and an absence will result in the final story being marked down one full letter grade.