Instructor: Amy Merrick
Class Times: Thursdays, 5:45-9 p.m., Daley 1129
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2-3 p.m., Daley 1139, or by appointment.
Telephone: 773-580-5781 (cell)
Email: amerric1@depaul.edu
Twitter: @amyjmerrick. I use my Twitter feed mainly for journalism industry news, internship and job opportunities, and links to great stories.
Class Tumblr page: http://depaulbusinessjournalism.tumblr.com

Course Description:

Business reporters develop the technical expertise to read balance sheets, budgets and earnings reports, teasing out hidden stories and scrutinizing overly optimistic forecasts. With their understanding of how commerce intersects with every aspect of society—from the White House to a Great Plains cattle ranch to a Southern California exurb—they are sought after for their investigative and critical-thinking skills. Most importantly, business reporters understand that every story is still about the people behind the numbers. Through readings, classroom discussions and writing assignments, this course will give students the foundation to report and write thorough, illuminating business stories.

Course Objectives:

By completing this course, you will learn to:

--Generate ideas for business stories
--Analyze SEC filings, balance sheets and earnings reports
--Communicate clearly and accurately with numbers
--Write breaking-news and feature stories on key business beats
--Find people and information to bring your stories to life
--Cover small and large companies—public, private and nonprofit
--Examine the legal and regulatory issues businesses face
--Report on the influence of money on politics
--Understand the unique ethical responsibilities of business reporters

Required Texts:


Student subscription to The Wall Street Journal ($1/week). Sign up here: http://student.wsj.com/info/2010/08/05/ordering-information/
Class Guidelines:

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

Late work will not be accepted under any circumstances. Working journalists do not have the flexibility to turn stories in late. If you have a written medical excuse, I will excuse an in-class assignment. If you miss a class meeting (with a verifiable excuse) on a day when assignments are due, you still must turn them in on time by emailing them to me.

Academic integrity: Cheating will not be tolerated. Fabricating information, making up sources and plagiarism are cheating. 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, phone, e-mail) at the end of each story for everyone you interview.

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.

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

Course evaluations: One of your responsibilities in this course will be to complete an online teaching evaluation. This course will be available for you to review during the 9th and 10th weeks of the quarter. Around that time, you’ll receive an email reminder. The course evaluations provide valuable feedback to help me continue to improve the class.
Grade Components:

5%: Attendance and willingness to work with an editor.

10%: Class participation, including discussion of business news and weekly readings.

15%: In-class projects.

20%: Midterm exam.

20%: Out-of-class business stories.

30%: 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 to undertake 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.
Grading criteria (cont.):

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. 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
**Assignments:**

**Readings:** Great writers are great readers, studying the successful work of others to learn new techniques. For this class, pay special attention to how reporters find and explain numbers. Then, how do they find people to bring their stories to life? Please bring your textbooks to class and bring to class copies of the articles we will be discussing.

**Business discussions:** Keep up with major business news, primarily through your daily reading of The Wall Street Journal, but also from other sources.

**In-class writing assignments:** Weekly in-class assignments will help you hone the skills needed to identify, report, write and revise business stories. We will focus quite a bit on the technical skills you’ll need, such as understanding SEC filings and deciphering balance sheets.

**Business stories:** These assignments will be done out of class. Each article must include at least one interview in a 500-word to 750-word, typed, double-spaced story. Submit your stories via Dropbox.

**Final project:** A 2,000-word business feature with at least five sources and two charts and/or sidebars. The story should focus on either DePaul or the Lincoln Park/Loop communities. It is due during finals week.
Weekly Topics and Assignments

Week 1: Sept. 11: Overview of Business Journalism

What counts as a business story?
The landscape of business publications and the evolution of coverage
Why business reporting matters to society
Where to look for business stories

Assignments for Sept. 18:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 1-3, “Business Journalism is More Fun than You Think,” “Public and Private and Ethics, Oh My!” and “It’s the Economy”
--Bring a list of five business story ideas in budget-line format

Week 2: Sept. 18: The Big, Bad Economy

Ethics of business journalism: special considerations
Public vs. private companies
Covering the macroeconomy; political implications

Assignments for Sept. 25:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 6, “The Ins and Outs of Company News Stories,” and Ch. 9, “Financial Numbers Can Be Your Friend”

Week 3: Sept. 25: Stories Buried in Balance Sheets

Understanding SEC filings
Deciphering income statements and balance sheets
Writing an earnings story

Assignments for Oct. 2:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 4, “The Beat Goes On,” and Ch. 5, “People’s Money is News,”
--Earnings story

Week 4: Oct. 2: When Business News Breaks

Resources for business reporters
Breaking-news stories
Covering key business beats
Assignments for Oct. 9:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 10, “The Corner Office”
--Read Peter Elkind, Jennifer Reingold and Doris Burke, “Inside Pfizer’s Palace Coup,”
http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/Documents/areas/adm/loeb/12_210.pdf
--Prepare for midterm

Assignment for Oct. 16:
--Business profile

Week 5: Oct. 9: Midterm; The CEO as Star and Sinner

Midterm exam
Covering executive pay
Labor reporting

Assignments for Oct. 16:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 15, “Government Issue”
--Read Jane Zhang, “Amid Fight for Life, Lupus Victim Fights for Insurance,”
--Business profile

Week 6: Oct. 16: Wall Street, Meet K Street

Business and government
How to read a budget
Introduce final projects

Assignments for Oct. 23:
--Read Spencer Soper and Scott Kraus, “Inside Amazon’s Warehouse” (first story only of series),
http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/Documents/areas/adm/loeb/12_577.pdf
--Read David Leonhardt and Kevin Quealy, “The American Middle Class is No Longer the World’s Richest,”
--Budget line for final project

Assignment for Oct. 30:
--Election guide

Week 7: Oct. 23: Working for a Living; Campaign Finance

Labor reporting
Campaign-finance databases

Assignments for Oct. 30:
--Read Show Me the Money Ch. 11, “Small in Size, Large for News,” and Ch. 12, “No Profits, but Lots of Money”
--Work on election guides
**Week 8: Oct. 30: Big Money, Small Business**

Small/local businesses and nonprofits
Finish election guides

**Assignments for Nov. 6:**
--Read *Show Me the Money* Ch. 13, “Headed to Court”
--Election follow-up story

**Week 9: Nov. 6: Election Wrap-up; Businesses in Trouble**

Election post-mortem
Business and the law
Controversies: environment, ethics, CEO pay, lawsuits, investigations

**Assignments for Nov. 13:**
--Final project

**Week 10: Nov. 13: Tech Booms and Busts; Final Projects**

Technology touches every business story
Business reporters as entrepreneurs
Jobs in business journalism
Present final projects

**Final Project Due (Thursday, Nov. 13):**

Your final story will be a 2,000-word business feature with at least five sources and two charts and/or sidebars, exploring the influence of campaign donations on an election race with significance to Chicago and/or Illinois voters. It will be due at the beginning of the exam period. You will not receive time to work on it during this class meeting. Each student will spend five to 10 minutes presenting his or her story to the class.