

Carolyn Nielsen

Journalism 307: Reporting: Bellingham Neighborhood News

Spring 2011

Syllabus

JOUR 307

MW 1 p.m. – 2:50 p.m.

Prof. Carolyn Nielsen

Office hours: M/W 10 a.m.-noon

Welcome to reporting. My goal is for this class to challenge you in new ways, familiarize you with cutting-edge practices in journalism and give you the confidence to excel in the field.

This class requires considerable work outside of the classroom. Bellingham neighborhoods (all accessible by bus) will be our reporting lab. Effective time management is an important skill in any profession; but is especially crucial in journalism, where reporters work on deadline and are at the mercy of their sources. Please plan ahead and use your time wisely so you don't fall behind.

I do NOT recommend taking this course concurrently with The Western Front as both require considerable reporting outside of class and during business hours.

Catalog description: Prerequisite: Journalism 207, newswriting. Interviewing, news coverage of community news sources with emphasis on public-affairs reporting. Introduction to computerized database reporting and investigative techniques. Writing for the news media.

Course objectives: This class will sharpen your news judgment, reporting and writing skills as we learn how to cover city neighborhoods. "Hyper-local" coverage is highly prized in newsrooms today.

I have designed this course to introduce you to both the solid, timeless basics of great reporting and the cutting-edge skills required to thrive in today's (and tomorrow's) newsrooms. In designing this course, I spoke with a number of newspaper editors about what they are looking for in new reporters. By the end of the quarter, you'll know what you need to know to succeed.

You will learn how to write compelling articles that show impacts on everyday people. You will learn how to work a beat and to find the stories that don't find you. In order to be successful, students must keep abreast of local current events and get out into the community and talk to people. That can be tricky at first, but it must be done, so just dive in.

Finally, you'll learn how to plan and execute multi-media and interactive components for your coverage.

You are required to check the Blackboard site and your university e-mail account regularly for updates, assignments and discussions.

Classroom atmosphere: In this course, we will critique our own work and the work of others. Looking at strong examples and hearing others' input on your writing is one of the best ways to improve. Sometimes it requires a thick skin. Critiques from the professor and the students should always be done in a constructive and professional manner.

If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or unsure how to improve, please visit me during my office hours. I am happy to help you identify your goals and what you can do to reach them.

To make the best use of everyone's time, please let me know when you plan to visit my office by signing up online. It's not required and you are welcome to stop by during office hours, but an appointment means you won't have to wait and can have as much time as you need.

Required materials: AP Stylebook, *When Words Collide* by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, daily edition of *The Bellingham Herald* (available for free outside the journalism department office).

Recommended resource: *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, by Roy Peter Clark (\$9 on Amazon.com).

Copy preparation: All copy must be double spaced and stapled. The student's last name must appear in the upper corner of each page. Put a "#" at the end of your story. A list of sources including full names and contact phone numbers must be included with every news story you submit.

Stories: Minimum of 650 words for stories. You must include at least three HUMAN sources. Do not use other newspaper publications as sources, even when crediting them. For example, avoid, "according to an article in *The Bellingham Herald*, Pike said..."

Rewrites: Rewrites are optional for every story and blog post except your final. Stories and blog posts are handed in on Wednesdays and returned on Mondays. Optional rewrites are due in class on the Wednesday after I hand back your work. You may earn a maximum of 10 points extra for rewriting. Late work is not eligible for rewriting. Work that earns a C or lower for a misspelled name/s or serious factual error cannot receive higher than a C, even after rewrite.

Rewriting often requires new reporting and adding significant information to your story or substantially reworking it. Making copy-editing changes will earn you a couple of points, but no more. When you turn in a rewrite, you **MUST** staple the graded first version to the new version. If you don't, I cannot grade your rewrite. The ability to revise your work for a higher grade is a benefit, not a requirement. I will be firm about requiring your graded copy be stapled to your rewrite.

Credentials: People you interview may ask you which news organization you represent. Tell all sources that you are a journalism student at WWU and your assignment is for a class and for your neighborhood news site. Do not promise anyone your stories will not be published because your blogs are considered "publishing."

Anonymous sources: Using anonymous sources damages your credibility and the value of your work. You must identify sources by first and last names. In very rare cases (such as crime victims) we may weigh anonymity, but never promise it to a source upfront. If you encounter a unique situation, see me.

Grading:

- Meeting deadlines is essential. Any late work is subject to a 10 % deduction in grade for every hour it is late.
- Accuracy is imperative. Any work with a misspelled proper noun or serious factual error will receive no higher than a C grade.

Grading standards for articles: 100 points

/10 Accuracy
/10 News peg
/10 Context
/10 Impact
/10 Human Dimension
/10 AP style and grammar
/10 Sourcing
/10 Clarity
/10 Balance and fairness
/5 Organization and structure

/5 Quotes

Grading standards for blog posts: 50 points

/10 News peg OR tie in to story
/10 Accuracy, including AP style and grammar
/10 Relevance to your audience (neighborhood)
/10 Clarity and writing style
/5 Organization (including length)
/5 Links (identified in text) or link sets (provided at bottom of post)

Required Assignments:

4 stories worth 10% each: 40%
3 blog posts worth 5% each: 15%
2 Listening Posts: 4% each: 8%
1 AP style/grammar quiz: 2%
Neighborhood Report (completed in 3 stages): 6% total
1 blog analysis: 5%
1 final story PLUS multi-media plan: 20%
Attendance and participation: 4%

Standards:

A= Exceeds expectations. Strong First 5 Graphs, tight writing, logical organization, excellent sourcing, shows balance and fairness, observes grammar and AP style rules.

B= Meets all expectations but may contain minor holes, wordy or imprecise writing. Does not contain any factual errors.

C= Meets most of the expectations. Needs reorganization to make it read clearly. May lack balance, contain editorializing or a factual error. Papers with misspelled names will not receive higher than a C grade.

D= Meets less than half of expectations. Contains more than one factual error, lacks proper sourcing or shows serious editorializing.

F= Meets very few expectations. Shows sloppy work.

Honesty and conduct: Students will cover some stories that could be covered by local media outlets (although our goal is really to scoop them). Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in an F. Plagiarism includes using quotes that you did not obtain. Use of materials from another author without attribution or credit is strictly prohibited. Misrepresentation or fabrication of sources, information or quotes will also result in an F. Stories for this class may not be used for credit in other journalism classes and vice versa. Doing so will result in an F.

Students may refer to Appendix C of the Western Bulletin: Academic Dishonesty Policy and Procedure, the WWU Dept. of Sociology Student Writing Guide: [The Student's Guide to Avoiding Plagiarism](#) (PDF) and [Western Libraries Plagiarism Information](#) and [Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism](#).

Absences: You should not miss class unless you have an acceptable reason and you must contact your instructor in advance just as you would your editor at work. Acceptable reasons for missing a class include verifiable illness, emergency or death in the family. You may be asked to provide documentation or sources to back up the reason for your absence. If you must miss a class, **I need to be notified ahead of time** or you will not be allowed to make up any missed work and any assignments will be considered late.

Please do not come to class if you are ill. Do be sure to turn your work in to me on time via e-mail if you miss class due to illness.

Assistance: Western is committed to equal opportunity and non-discrimination in all programs and activities. Requests for accommodation or assistance should be directed to the Office of Student Life, x3844.