

MC4250: Civic Journalism and Public Affairs Reporting Fall 2001

Louisiana State University
Manship School of Mass Communication
Thursday 1:40-5:30 (Hodges Hall B-9)

Vital Statistics

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❖ The course schedule will be kept up-to-date on-line in SemesterBook.

Course Objective

This is a course focused on democracy and journalism. We will explore the meaning of democratic life and how elements of democratic life are captured as news. Along the way, our studies will focus on the role of politics in a complex society, the role of citizens in public life, the role of government as a core institution in public life and the impact of journalistic work. Eventually, this path of study will lead to the doorstep of civic journalism.

Civic journalism (a.k.a. public journalism, community journalism) is a relative newcomer to journalistic practice, but it has roots in the history of the craft. In many cities across the country, civic journalism is taking hold. Though the forms vary from place to place, the guiding principles remain the same. Many professionals and academics believe civic journalism is the answer to better reporting and possibly better ratings or circulation for the media involved. In some cities, this form of reporting changes the media approach to coverage of public affairs. This course has three primary goals. The first is to help you understand the principles and problems associated with civic journalism, both in theory and practice. Secondly, we will put the principles learned in class to the test in our own civic journalism coverage. Finally, we will assess our efforts.

Your Skills

You are expected to know and use AP style, spelling and good grammar. You should also be comfortable with the structure and conventions of news coverage. Most of all, you should bring your brain and a desire to think in new ways about the practice of journalism.

Expectations

This is an intensive course. The first half of the class has heavy reading about journalism norms and routines in general. As we get further into the readings, we will start connecting concepts we have studied with elements of civic journalism. About the time midterms begin, we will shift into a how-to mode, looking at ways to put what we have learned into practice. At this time you will be developing coverage by getting to know the community at different levels.

All written assignments will be graded for grammar, spelling, punctuation, use of language and following the appropriate style for that assignment in this course (Associated Press Print or Broadcast Style and general grammar). You are also expected to read newspapers, magazines, listen to NPR news and watch TV news.

Deadlines:

Journalism is 60 percent planning and 40 percent execution. Deadlines are firm, just like in the business. So if you are a minute late to class, your assignment is also a minute late and it will earn a zero.

Expected Outcomes

This course will challenge your beliefs about journalism. You will develop a strong understanding of the current conventions of journalistic practice. You will also examine the connections between journalism, participatory democracy and public life. Most importantly, you will learn to apply journalism theory to innovative practice. In the end, this course will change the way you understand the practice of journalism and the way you undertake that practice in the future.

Thoughts Journals

Thoughts journals are your thoughts based on the assigned readings. These journals should be between 600 and 800 words total (about 2 pages). You should show that you understand the main points the author is making and also discuss how you understand the material. This could be a discussion of new ideas the readings sparked or challenges to your existing positions on a topic. It is not enough to simply outline the main points. You must show that you thought about and extended or altered your thinking in some way. Thoughts journals are due 24 hours before class and must be submitted via email. You may choose to put it in the body of the email or attach a Microsoft Word document to the email. Remember that all writing and grammar rules count for this assignment.

Key Assignments

Stories:

You will be expected to turn in a well-developed story. There are many forms these can take and you may choose to vary your format for different stories. All stories will contain sources from at least three of the five layers of civic life. Considered as a whole, your stories must cover all five layers of civic life. In addition, you must have an example of each type of community leader within your group of stories, though not every type need be represented in every story. More details of the story assignments will be discussed as we transition into a reporting mode. *Undergraduates should note that the two highest reporting grades will be used to determine their reporting grade. However, if an assignment is turned in late or is not completed, that assignment will be used as one of the two reporting grades. Simply stated, you must do your best on all reporting assignments to earn the right to drop your lowest reporting grade. Graduate students may choose to complete only two of the reporting assignments to create time to focus on their research proposal.

Reflective Paper (undergraduates only):

This is a formal paper reflecting on your engagement with civic journalism. You are expected to tie together the readings, lectures, and experiences related to this course into a 3-5 page paper. The paper should be typed, double-spaced.

Research Proposal (graduate students only):

This is an opportunity to practice preparing for writing your thesis. This 10 to 15 page proposal must follow the Manship School guidelines for writing a thesis proposal. It should cover the introduction, literature review and a brief methodology.

Grading

Grading will be based on professional standards in the industry. You will be graded primarily on your ability to apply concepts learned in class to your work. Here is how your assignments will be weighted in determining your grade for the course:

		Undergrads	Grads
Thoughts Journals	6	25%	25%
Coverage	3-5	35%	35%
Reflective Paper	1	30%	---
Research Proposal	1	---	30%
Participation	10	10%	10%

Grade Appeals

Grade appeals for any course work must be made in writing within two weeks of the original grade posting in SemesterBook. The appeal must be typed and must include the assignment, due date, date and time it was turned in, the specific issue that warrants grade change consideration and the grade you believe would accurately reflect the work quality you produced on that assignment. Any appeals turned in after the two-week period will not be considered.

Absences

Excused absences are those absences recognized by Louisiana State University (illness, serious family emergency, special curricular requirements, court imposed legal obligations, military obligations, serious weather conditions, religious holidays, university athletic event participation, university musical event participation). Any excused absence requires documentation of the reason for absence. For example, if a person in your immediate family dies, bring a copy of the obituary or a funeral notice. If the relationship is not obvious, it must be documented. The instructor will determine what is considered adequate documentation. No make-up work will be allowed for unexcused absences and you will receive a zero for any missed assignments. This is to protect students who play by the rules.

Class attendance will not be recorded. So come to class when you want and miss if you must. If you want to be allowed to make-up missed assignments, bring documentation of a LSU recognized excused absence. Otherwise, those points are gone for good. Just realize that it is not possible to pass this course without the information presented in class. It is also not possible to participate in class when you are not present. Much of the in-class work and critiques cannot be replicated outside of that setting. It will help to get notes from classmates, but nothing can replace your presence and participation in class. An excused absence will earn you the average of the rest of your participation grades for the semester for the first two missed classes and a zero for every missed day after that (excused or unexcused).

Class will begin on-time and if you plan to attend you should be present before class begins. If you are late, do not disrupt the class when you enter. If you disrupt the course you may be asked to leave. I will not repeat information already presented in class simply because you were late to class. You may stop by during my office hours to ask those questions.

Whether the absence is excused or unexcused, it is the student's responsibility to obtain notes and information about assignments in the course. I will be available during my office hours to assist you.

Beepers and Cell Phones

Set your cell phones and pagers to stun during class (including mine). I get to answer any pages or phone calls you receive during class if your phone disrupts the class or newscast (I hope whoever calls is nice!). I guess that means you get to answer mine if it disrupts class. Unless it relates directly to class business, please do not take phone calls during class.

Participation

In this course, participation is defined as contributing to the learning of others in the class. It is more than just speaking up in class or having a lot to say. It includes being prepared, asking intelligent questions and answering questions thoughtfully. I will make notes during and after each class about individual participation. Grades will be based on 100 possible points. The instructor has sole discretion for deciding which days will be used to collect the participation grade and these days will not be announced. Participation will be noted for all newscasts. At the end of each newscast you are required to submit an email to me detailing what you worked on for that newscast.

Academic Misconduct

There are several offenses that will get you fired on the spot in the working world of television news. The same offenses will get you a referral to the Dean of Student's Office for disciplinary action. Please note that I take these offenses seriously and will initiate action based on the Manship School and LSU policy.

The *LSU Code of Student Conduct* is very specific on what is considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is "the unacknowledged inclusion, in work submitted for credit, of someone else's words, ideas, or data." This includes the use of video shot by anyone outside your assigned group. Premeditated academic misconduct is committing an offense "which grows out of advance contemplation or mediation, prior deliberation, or planning." It is also premeditated academic misconduct to supply another student materials for use in fulfilling academic requirements.

Remember these rules:

- ✚ DO NOT take tape from another source (including your classmates) and portray it as your own.
- ✚ NEVER quote anyone as having told you something if they did not, whether directly or as a background source. If you can't justify the source, don't use it.
- ✚ DO NOT interview friends, roommates or others, and portray them as someone they are not. Do not do person-on-the-street interviews with friends or set-ups. Those interviews must be randomly selected.
- ✚ DO NOT take the words of other reporters, print or broadcast, and portray them as your own.
- ✚ Work turned in for this course may not be submitted for credit in any other course.
- ✚ All work must be completed using the Manship School equipment unless you receive permission from the instructor PRIOR to use of the equipment.

Required Texts

1. Glasser, Theodore L. (ed.)(1999). The Idea of Public Journalism. Guilford: New York, NY.
2. Rosen, Jay (1999). What Are Journalists For? Yale University Press: New Haven, CT.
3. Reese et al. (2001) Framing Public Life. LEA: New York.
4. Tapping Civic Life (handout)
5. Associated Press Broadcast or Print Stylebook.
6. Iyengar, Shanto & Richard Reeves (1997) Do The Media Govern? Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA. (On 2 hour reserve at Middleton Library)
7. Munson, Eve Stryker & Catherine A. Warren (eds.)(1997) James Carey: A Critical Reader. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN.

Equipment & Supplies

- 1 ream of 20 lb. copy paper (to have access to printers in the labs).

Schedule

This schedule may be modified as the semester progresses. All modifications will be announced in class and will be updated in SemesterBook.

Date	Topic for the Day	Readings due for this week	Assignments due
August 31	Exploring Community	Tapping Civic Life Civic Newspapers	None
September 7	Going Public	Iyengar: Ch 15, 19, 32, 37: Reporters and Public Officials. (Middleton Reserve)	Attend an official and a quasi-official meeting. Journal #1 is on your experience and the readings.
September 14	Field work on Third Place, Incidental and Private spaces. **We will not meet today**	Reese Ch. 13 Rosen Parts 1 & 2 (82)	Journal #1
September 21	Journalism & Democracy		Re-do Journal #1 on all 5 spaces and Iyengar, Rosen, Reese readings. Due on 9/20.
September 28	Tenets of Civic Journalism Civic Mapping	Glasser Chapter 1,3,4 (53) Carey Chapter (online) Rosen Part 3 (74) Glasser Chapter 5 (14)	Journal #2 is on the readings for this week (see update).
October 5	Doing Civic Journalism Developing a project	Rosen Part 4 (50) Glasser Part II (76)	Journal #3 is on the readings.
October 12 (Fall Break)	No Class	Reese Ch. 18	
October 19 (Midterms)	Coverage design/planning	Reese Ch. 17 A Round World in Public Life Tapping Civic Life Public Capital Will Any Kind of Talk Do? Citizens & Politics Grads also read: Glasser Appendices	Journal #4 – Galsser Ch. 17 & 18, Harwood publications online. Also, your civic map (2 pages) *Grad students bring a paper topic idea to discuss in office hours.
October 26	Project Day 1		Coverage design
November 2	Project Day 2		
November 9	Project Day 3		Story #1
November 16	Project Day 4		
November 23 (Thanksgiving)	No class		
November 30	Project Day 5		Story #2
December 7	Finishing Touches Debriefing		Story #3 Final Papers Due

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