

JOUR 302 – Print Reporting

Spring 2008

CELESTE FREMON

Th 5 – 7:40 p.m
Hancock Studio C

Office hours by Appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

By the end of this course you should be able to report and thoroughly research a comprehensive news story, then write it on deadline for publication in a small newspaper, using a clear, concise and fair-minded style.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

As you might imagine, this class is mostly about reporting, but you will also learn how to write what you report. In this class, as in the professional world, the two are essential and inseparable. In practical fact, most of your time will be spent on the reporting of stories. By the end of the semester you'll know what kind of information is needed for various types of stories, plus where to go and how to get that information. You'll learn interviewing techniques, the art of cultivating good sources, including the less obvious sources, and how to get reluctant witnesses, sources and public officials to talk to you. Finally you'll learn how to turn the information you've gathered into a cohesive, rigorously-researched story that holds the reader's attention. In all of these areas, you'll learn to think on your feet, hone your critical thinking skills, confront reporting road blocks, and overcome your fears. You will be repeatedly asked to stretch beyond your comfort level. In short, the course will focus on *learning by doing*.

With each assignment, you'll be asked to provide a source list so I can spot check your stories for accuracy. For the final project, you'll be asked to report and write a longer story---approximately 1500 words--- about a topic of your choice within our target city of Bell Gardens. There will also be occasional in-class assignments. To make sure you stay on the right track, topics for your shorter assignments and for your final project must be approved by me before hand.

More than anything, this class will function as a news room/editorial board in which you are required to discuss your own story ideas/problems/victories with “colleagues” and “editors” as a professional newspaper reporter would, and act as a sounding board for your fellow reporters as they struggle to chase after strong, publishable stories on their own beats.

OUTCOMES

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1. Complete at least eight stories
2. Complete several in-class stories
3. Complete your big, final project story
(Your final story will be a minimum 1,500 words; minimum of five quoted sources)
4. U.S. Census/American FactFinder research assignment
5. You'll learn to function within a newsroom environment, both as a reporter and as an "editorial board member" helping your fellow "reporters" land and write intriguing and solid news stories.

TEXTBOOKS

Required

ISBN: 0465004881

Title: Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law

Author: Norm Goldstein

Publisher: Basic Books/Perseus

ISBN: 0073526142

Title: Inside Reporting

Author: Tim Harrower

Publisher: McGraw Hill

Dictionary: Merriam Webster, www.m-w.com

Optional

ISBN: 0205262589

Title: Creative Interviewing

Author: Ken Metzler

Publisher: Allyn & Bacon

EQUIPMENT

You will be expected to purchase some kind of voice recorder for this class. (Either a digital or a cassette recorder will do.)

I also recommend that you acquire a digital camera of some sort, but this is optional.

NEWS QUIZZES

I'll give a news quiz at the beginning of class every week. It will consist of 10 questions and will focus on that week's big local, state, national and international stories. Any serious journalist must be aware of the local/national/international news context in which you are reporting, and knowledgeable about the world around you. You're required to read sections A & B of the Los Angeles Times every day. On Sundays add the Opinion section. You'd also be wise to peruse big online news sites and aggregators like cnn.com, nytimes.com, washingtonpost.com, pointer.org/medianews, laweekly.com, huffingtonpost.com, news.bbc.co.uk, laobserved.com.

BEAT NOTES

Each week you'll be required to give me a brief but clear Beat Note that details exactly how you have spent your time that week developing your beat and your current and future stories. This will include sources you've developed and spoken with, notes as to what stories are developing your beat area. Your beat notes will also serve as the basis for your story proposals.

You will be provided with standard story proposal forms that you can use in addition to your Beat Notes, but not instead of them.

There's no required format or length for the Beat Notes, but they should be a clear accounting of what you've been doing, and you plan to proceed on your stories. Beat notes are one of the ways I assess the work you're doing outside of class in the field.

ASSIGNMENT AND FINAL PROJECT GRADING

- A. ***Basic criteria*** - *Students should be graded on clarity; organization; accuracy; fairness/balance; completeness/omissions; AP style, grammar, punctuation and spelling; ability to meet deadlines.*

All stories MUST include a COMPLETE source list (for people you must include their title, organization name, phone number and e-mail address; Web sites must have URLs; printed sources must have bibliographic information). Incomplete source lists will result in lower grades.

1. "A" stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well-written and require only minor editing (i.e., they are publishable).
2. "B" stories require more than minor editing, and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.

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3. *“C” stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors.*
4. *“D” stories require excessive rewriting and have numerous errors, and should not have been submitted.*
5. *“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, have numerous errors or both. If a story has a major factual error or a misspelled proper name, it will receive an F.*

B. Late assignments

They aren't accepted, simple as that. A missing assignment means a zero grade on that assignment.

C. Rewrites

In certain instances I will allow you to get further information to complete and rewrite a story, then the two grades---that of the original and the revised story---will be averaged

D. Assignment Format

You must come to class with a hard copy of your assignment. Don't expect to print them in class. Do not email me assignments unless you are going to be absent.

Assignments must be double-spaced with your name, my name and the course number at the top of the page.

COURSE GRADES

Stories, story pitches, quizzes, assignments, beat notes	65%
Final story	<u>35%</u>
Total	100%

ATTENDANCE POLICY

You are expected to be in class every week. The only acceptable reason to miss a class is illness or a genuine emergency. You must get my approval in advance for any anticipated absence. **If you must miss a class, you're responsible for getting your**

assignment to me on the day of class---either by email, or hand-carried by another student.

You cannot miss this class or any other USC class to cover a story.

PLAGIARISM AND ETHICS

Plagiarism is defined as taking the writings or work of another and passing them off as your own. In the working world, plagiarism or fabrication---cooking facts or making things up--- will get you fired. In this class it will cause you to fail. In a professional context, fictionalizing can do mortal damage to the career of even the most talented reporter, and tarnish the reputation of his or her publication for a long time to come. Don't do it under any circumstances. If you're unsure what constitutes plagiarism and/or fictionalizing, ask me.

Below you'll find the policies on academic integrity for the School of Journalism and for USC as published in the University catalogue. Take them to heart.

ANNENBERG SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

Since its founding, the USC Annenberg School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence.

Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations or purchasing papers or other assignments will immediately receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism.

There are no exceptions to this policy.

USC STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty.

PROFESSIONAL DRESS CODE:

For the purposes of this class, you are a member of the working press. When you are out in the field you should expect to be treated with the courtesy and privileges accorded to the press. By the same token, you should dress in such a way that represents the profession in

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a dignified and appropriate manner. If you don't take yourself seriously, no one else will. While conducting interviews and field research for this class you are expected to dress in **proper business attire**.

Also, when you email sources, use your USC email address, not a personal email address.

WRITING COACHES

This program has excellent writing coaches. They are available in ASC 227 during posted drop-in times and by appointment. They are: Bob Berger, rberger@usc.edu, Ed Boyer, edjboyer@ca.rr.com

Brad Hanson, brad.hanson@latimes.com

One small note: The coaches may look at your work after it is turned in and graded by me, but not before.

DISABILITY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301. Its phone number is 213-740-0776.

CELESTE FREMON BIO

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I've been a free-lance reporter and writer since 1976 writing regularly for the LA Weekly, the Los Angeles Times Magazine, LA Times opinion pages, as well as such publications as Los Angeles Magazine, Ms., MSNBC.com, Reader's Digest, and Salon Magazine.

I've reported on a wide range of issues but I specialize in gangs, law enforcement, criminal justice and education policy

My reporting has taken me across the United States, to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central America.

I'm the author of *G-Dog and the Homeboys* (1995, 2004, 2008), about Father Greg Boyle and the gangs of the Pico Aliso housing projects of East LA, which will be out in a new updated edition later this year. I'm presently working on a new book, *An American Family*, about the life of a parolee, his wife and kids, during his first four years out of prison (based on my year-long 2004 LA Weekly series of the same name).

My stories and essays have been internationally syndicated, and are regularly anthologized in academic and literary texts such as *The Modern Gang Reader* (1995, 2000, 2006) *California Dreams and Realities: Readings for Critical Thinkers and Writers* (1995), *Writing For A Lifetime: Contemporary Readings from Popular Sources* (2000), and *Now, Write, Nonfiction Writing Exercises From Today's Best Writers & Teachers* (2007).

I've been given a string of awards by such organizations as the Los Angeles Press Club, the Western Publications Association, the Missouri Lifestyle Journalism Awards, the Sunday Magazine Editors Association, PEN USA, the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, the New York Library Association, and the American Library Association.

I've also worked as a consultant for an assortment of TV news shows and documentaries, among them "60 Minutes" the BBC, and ABC News. I adapted *Father Greg & the Homeboys* as a feature film for Sony Pictures Entertainment; co-produced "The Baby Snatcher" for Hearst Entertainment and CBS (1992), and adapted my article, "The Great Sorority Rush," for Lorimar and ABC. In addition, several of my articles have been optioned for feature film and/or television development.

I'm the creator and editor of WitnessLA.com (<http://witnessla.com>) and a Senior Fellow for Social Justice/New Media at the USC Annenberg Institute for Justice and Journalism.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE

Week 1 - Jan. 17 Course Overview & Syllabus Review

What is reporting?
What is a beat?
Beat assignments
Developing story ideas
Building a source list
Reporting methods I: Showing up, telephones, e-mail
Interviewing Techniques I: The basics
Fact Checking
Story Proposals

Assignments: U.S. Census Fact Finder exercise; three additional story pitches; 500 word single interview story

Readings: Harrower Chapters 1-2

Week 2 - Jan. 24 Developing a Beat

Interviewing techniques II: How to get sources to talk to you
Hard news vs. soft news – deciding when to use a soft or hard lead
Finding sources I: authorities, official experts, community experts, public figures, anecdotal, advocates, witnesses
Tape recorders and note taking

Homework: Reported Story #1
Readings: Harrower Chapters 3, 4

Week 3 - Jan. 31 Covering Elections

Building a news story
Getting access
Finding the hidden issues
Cultivating sources
Current election issues

Developing a copy morgue on your beat

Homework: Reported Story #2

Readings: Harrower Chapters 5, 6

Week 4 - Feb. 7 Covering Law Enforcement: Part I

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Accessing Public Crime records – LAPD, LA County Sheriff’s,
CHP and local
Preparing for crime stories (homicides and other felonies)

Homework: Reported Story #3

Readings: Harrower Chapters 7-10

Week 5 - Feb. 14 Covering law Enforcement: Part II

Your rights as a journalist in relationship to the police; law
enforcement’s obligation to the public
Techniques for talking to cops; talking to victims; talking to
community members and witnesses

Accessing public crime records II

Using active language
“Branch to the Right”

Homework: Reviewing arrest warrants

Homework: Reported Story #3 - Due Feb. 28

Week 6 - Feb. 21 Covering Local Government

Local government structure
Agencies and advocates
Official and unofficial sources
Meetings vs. News

Week 7 - Feb. 28 Court Reporting

Criminal procedure; judicial system
Criminal vs. civil courts
Preparing to cover a trial

Homework: Pull a criminal court file
Reported story #4

Week 8 - March 6 Chasing the Breaking Story

The art of breaking a story
Chasing a moving story

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Getting ahead of the pack
Sourcing on a fast deadline
Interviewing techniques III

Homework: Reported story # 5 – Breaking news

Week 9 - March 13 Finding and Reporting the Untold Stories

Discuss stories, how to find them
Discuss final story proposals in detail

Homework: Reported #6 - due March 27
Finished story proposals – due March 27

Week 10 - Week of March 17 - SPRING BREAK

Week 11- March 27 Covering “the community”

What is “the community?”
Us and Them
Grass roots versus astro-turf
Investigative listening

REVIEW FINAL STORY PROPOSALS

Homework: Reported Story #6

Week 12 - April 3 Covering Education

School governance structures
How schools & school districts are managed at local and state levels
Current education issues

Homework: Reported Story #7

Week 13 - April 10 Covering Speeches and news conferences

NOTE: FRIDAY, APRIL 11 IS THE LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS WITH A MARK OF "W."

Finding speeches and news conferences
Digging out the hot story from within the public event
How to write non-chronological stories

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Homework: Reported Story #8 (Profile based on speech or live event due April 24)

Week 14 - April 17 Writing profiles and longer features

Using multiple sources, data, color, scenes
Organizing longer stories
Reporting for scenes

Update on final story

Week 15- April 24 The Investigative Feature Story

How to write strong, engaging prose using an array of unassailable, surprising, story-making facts

Homework: Keeping working on final story (finish first draft for review May 1)

Week 16 - May 1 Review final projects

FINAL PROJECT IS DUE ON: May 9