

COURSE SYLLABUS, J-402, BROADCAST REPORTING

Meets Tuesdays, 9 a.m. – 12:20 p.m., Fall 2007

Instructor: David Dow

Course Overview:

In addition to attending class, students must also work a reporting shift for Annenberg TV News (ATVN) every other week. The minimum shift is six hours, but students should schedule their day to stay longer, if necessary, to finish their story. In alternate weeks, students will produce an “evergreen” feature story which will also be considered for broadcast by ATVN.

Course Objective:

This course will enrich the skills required to produce a news report from start to finish. You will hone the mechanics of developing, producing, writing, shooting, editing and presenting a story for air on a television newscast. Your writing and storytelling skills, the central skills of reporting, will be strengthened. You will learn to be flexible and fast as you adapt to deadline pressures. At the end of this course, you should feel confident in your ability to write and produce a variety of stories in an ethical, engaging, clear and informative manner.

Course Requirements:

Required broadcast training workshops (if not taken in previous semesters): Camcorder, AVID editing.

This course will be run much like a standard newsroom operation. The syllabus is provided as a general outline of what to expect in each class, but IT IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE, just as reporters learn to deal with unexpected developments in a newsroom and news environment.

Because we are journalists, deadlines are critical. **LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FAILING GRADE.** If you are going to be late to class or miss a class, you must notify the instructor by e-mail or phone message beforehand. If your absence is determined to be an “excused absence” based on university guidelines, you will be permitted to make up missed assignments **BY THE NEXT CLASS SESSION.** If you have an unexcused absence, you will receive a zero for the missed work. The same is true for unexcused tardiness. Three unexcused absences or tardies are grounds for an “F” for the course.

This class meets only once a week, so attendance is critical. Do not expect the instructor to fill you in on the material you have missed. It will be your responsibility to get this information from other students.

Current events/quizzes.

A major responsibility of every journalist is keeping abreast of the day’s news. Even stories that seem remote in geography or subject matter may engender local spin-offs (Note how many local stories have flowed from the current Iraq War). **You can expect regular news quizzes on current events, usually composed of 10 questions, promptly at the beginning of most class sessions.** Quiz material will be taken from the print and/or online editions of the *Los Angeles Times*. Questions drawn from assigned reading and class lectures and discussions may be included, too. There will be no make-up sessions for missed quizzes.

Class Participation:

Journalism involves a team effort, with each team member contributing. Every student is expected to be a full-fledged participant in this class. That includes arriving on time to all class sessions and engaging fully in class discussions and exercises. Your assigned packages will be screened in class, and you will be expected to accept and give constructive criticism. You will learn from honest, thoughtful critiques, and you will be expected to provide same to your colleagues. Disingenuous flattery doesn’t help anyone.

Course Grading (Weighted):

ATVN day-of-air assignments.....	20 %
Evergreen assignments (not including midterm and final)....	20%
Class participation and homework.....	10%
Quizzes.....	10%
Midterm project.....	15%
Final project.....	25%

Grading Criteria: Packages and Writing Assignments:

A. Basic Criteria: Overall, you’ll be graded on adherence to the basics of good journalism: Clarity, accuracy, organization, fairness/balance, completeness, grammar, spelling, punctuation and, of course, **ability to meet deadlines.** Grades will also reflect your grasp of the basic tenets of videography and editing.

In addition, the quality of the stories you select will affect your grade. Stories should have broad, engaging appeal and contain multiple elements.

B. Grading Guidelines: In general, letter grades will be assigned according to the following guidelines (Evaluation of journalistic products is inherently subjective. Other, overriding factors could enter the grading process.):

1. “A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well-written, well shot and well-produced and require only minor editing or changes. The contain

- well-selected sound bites that contribute impact and flavor. In sum, they are stories that are “airworthy.” Grades for this level could result in an A or A-.
2. “B” stories reflect solid work but require more than minor editing and have style, spelling or production errors (e.g., video doesn’t match script) or one significant error of omission. Grades for this level of work could result in a B, B+ or B-.
 3. “C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have multiple spelling, style, production or omission errors. Camera work and editing techniques are mediocre or unimaginative. Sound bites add little impact or flavor. Grades could be C, C+ or C-.
 4. “D” stories require excessive reworking, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted. Camera work is unsatisfactory or fails to show important elements. Grades could be D, D+ or D-.
 5. “F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, have numerous errors or both. A story that has a factual error that is material to the story merits an “F.” **So does failure to meet a deadline! It’s Annenberg policy.**

In addition, here are other circumstances that would warrant an “F”:

1. Plagiarizing a script, portions of a script or information from any source. (See policy statement below.)
2. Staging video: Asking a story or interview subject to do something specific (e.g., to light up a cigarette for a story on smoking.) “Set-up” shots—wide shots and reverses for an interview—or “walking” shots are a gray area, but are generally accepted.
3. Using video shot by someone else and presenting it as one’s own work. And, using video shot for another class in a project submitted for this class.
4. Telling an interview subject what you want him or her to say.
5. Distorting video: Shooting video in one location and presenting it as being another location.
6. Using the camcorder to intentionally intimidate, provoke or incite a person or group of people to elicit more “dramatic” video.
7. Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview.

Equipment and Editing:

The procedures for checking out camera equipment will be discussed on the first day of class. The camera guidelines differ for day-of-air assignments and evergreen projects. You will be editing on the AVID system (Rm. G40).

While in the Annenberg Newsroom, or on assignment for ATVN, you are to follow the rules and procedures of Serena Cha and her team of executive producers. They have the final say on everything related to ATVN News, which is the format that is providing you with the experience of completing day-of-air stories and airing them. While the executive producers will not be grading your work, they will provide me with a review of your progress during your ATVN shifts.

Your completed ATVN day-of-air assignments and your completed, revised evergreen assignments must be dubbed to a regular VHS tape or DVD for grading. **You will be responsible for purchasing your own VHS tapes (or DVDs) and mini-DV tapes.** I recommend you have two VHS tapes or DVDs, one for day-of-air packages, one for evergreens. Once your evergreen packages have been revised, according to the instructor's changes, you are responsible for submitting the final package on mini-DV tape to the teaching assistant (T/A), who will deliver it to ATVN. **Deliver the final, revised evergreen package on VHS or DVD so I can grade it at home. (You do not need to dub an evergreen to VHS or DVD for the initial screening in class. That can be done from mini-DV.)**

Very Important ! Your day-of-air assignments and your evergreens must be accompanied by a script (WITH ANCHOR LEAD-INS) when submitted to this class AND FOR AIR ON ATVN.

Since this class is the only J402 class this semester, we will divide into two groups, RED and BLUE, and rotate assignments. During the week the RED team is assigned to ATVN, for example, the BLUE team will be doing their evergreens.

Plagiarism/Academic Integrity Policy:

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writing from another and passing them off as one's own. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity. A student found guilty of plagiarism is subject to dismissal from the journalism major.

The following is the School of Journalism's **policy on academic integrity**, as published in the University catalogue.:

“Since its founding, the USC 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 assignment will received 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.”

Diversity:

In addition to being ethical in developing, writing and producing your stories, it is important that you consider diversity. Is the story fair and does it represent all stakeholders in a balanced manner? Are the sound bites you have selected representative of the community involved in the story.

Professional Dress Policy:

Reporters are no different from representatives of other organizations. If they are badly or inappropriately dressed, it can affect the impression they make and the results they get. When going on interviews, dress in a manner that fits the situation and shows respect for the interviewee. Flip-flops and scruffy shirts are out. So are revealing necklines and bare midriffs. And never wear an advertisement during an interview or other on-camera assignment – not even a USC sweatshirt.

Internships:

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in the course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester will earn academic credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

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 the instructor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, phone 213-740-0776.

About the Instructor:

David Dow has been teaching broadcast reporting, production and writing at USC for six years, following a 29-year reporting career with CBS News television and radio. He covered stories in more than two-dozen countries, including almost every country of Latin America.

Domestically, he has covered seven presidential nominating conventions, the campaigns of five presidential candidates, the Rodney King beating trials and attendant riot and both O. J. Simpson trials (criminal and civil). Dow has also done extensive space coverage, including many shuttle flights and unmanned planetary missions.

He is a native Californian and graduate of Stanford University, where he later returned as a Stanford Professional Journalism (now Knight) Fellow. He's co-author of "Cameras in the Courtroom: Television and the Pursuit of Justice" (Rowman & Littlefield).

CLASS SCHEDULE

(The details in the schedule rundown are as firm as we can make them as this class begins. However, we know from experience that adjustments may be necessary to meet student instructional needs and introduce any new materials that may enhance the curriculum.)

Note: Pop quizzes on current events may be given at any class session.

Week 1, August 28:

Discussion:

- Course expectations
- Syllabus review
- ATVN procedures (Class ATVN liaison and production/tech staff)
- Reporter's checklist
- Grading criteria
 - "Standards for Evaluating News Packages"
 - "Eight Tests of a Good TV News Package."
- How to write a story pitch

Exercise: Diagnostic writing exercise

Homework Assignment: Two story ideas for Evergreen No. 1
Check out camera and accessories from equipment room.

Week 2, September 4:

Due: Two story ideas for Evergreen No. 1. (Be prepared to verbally "pitch" your preferred story.)

Discussion:

- Camera and shooting techniques. Presentation on new Sony HDV cameras.
- Review story ideas – newsroom "story conference."

-- What is news; what isn't?

Exercise: In-class critique of local and national news packages—"The Good, the Bad and the So-So."

Assignments:

- Write a script based on material handed out in class.
- Begin setting up interviews for Evergreen No. 1 (Instructor will assign story via e-mail after reviewing the two story pitches submitted at today's session.)

Week 3, September 11:

Due: SCRIPT based on material handed out at last class.

Discussion:

- Editing "do's and don'ts"
- Reporter stand-ups: When, why and how. Review handout: "On-Camera Stand-up Check List."

Exercise: Write, memorize and shoot a stand-up bridge and close. (You may do several "takes"). If class time allows, stand-ups will be screened in this class session; otherwise at next session.

Assignment:

- Reading from "Broadcast Voice Handbook"
- Dub onto VHS (or be able to call up on the internet) one reporter package from a local news program. Write a one-page critique, analyzing the writing, shooting, editing and reporter on-camera.
- Work on Evergreen No. 1

Note: All students will be required to attend a 45-minute ATVN orientation session this week.

Week 4, September 18:

Due: Written critique of local news package, with VHS dub (or internet play-back).

Discussion:

- Screen, discuss local news submissions.
- Delivering the news -- Vocal style and flow
- Marking up scripts for delivery

Exercise: Write, mark-up and deliver aloud an assigned story.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: **ATVN run-throughs.** Report for your assigned shift and dub on VHS (from the broadcast air check) your completed story for submission, with script and “Q” sheet, at Week 5 class.

- BLUE TEAM: Complete work on Evergreen No. 1 for submission on mini-DV with script at Week 5 class session. Do NOT submit to ATVN until after making revisions we suggest in Week 5 class.

- Reading: “Focus on Going Live” (From *Broadcast Voice Handbook*).

Week 5, September 25:

Due: RED TEAM: ATVN #1 (on VHS) with script and “Q” sheet.
BLUE TEAM: Evergreen #1 (on mini-DV; subject to revisions)

Discussion:

- Screen and discuss Evergreens.
- Going live : When, why, how? (With video examples.)

Exercise:

- Live reporting practice, based on hand-out story.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: Complete Evergreen #1
- BLUE TEAM: ATVN #1 and REVISIONS of Evergreen #1 (on VHS, with script, to instructor; on mini-DV, with script and cut sheet to our T/A, who will give it to ATVN.) PREPARE TWO “PITCHES” FOR Evergreen #2
- Read “Ethics and the Law,” from *Broadcast News*.

Week 6, October 2:

Due: RED TEAM: Evergreen #1 (On mini-DV, subject to revisions)
BLUE TEAM: ATVN #1 (on VHS), final EVERGREEN #1 (on VHS for instructor; on mini-DV with script and cut sheet for T/A) and two pitches for Evergreen #2

Discussion:

- Ethical dilemmas
- BLUE TEAM story pitches –newsroom story conference.

Exercise: Critique RED TEAM Evergreen #1 submissions.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: ATVN #2; Revisions Evergreen #1. Prepare two “pitches” for Evergreen #2
- BLUE TEAM: Work on Evergreen #2,

Week 7, October 9:

Due: RED TEAM: ATVN #2. Final revision, Evergreen #1.
BLUE TEAM; Evergreen #2 (subject to revisions)

Discussion:

- Choosing your midterm subject...story conference on “pitches”
- Possible guest speaker
- Using Nat SOT and “strategic pauses” to improve your stories.

Exercise: Class critique of Blue Team evergreens.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: EVERGREEN #2
- BLUE TEAM: ATVN #2 and Final EVERGREEN #2
- TBA reading

Week 8, October 16:

Due: RED TEAM: EVERGREEN #2 (subject to revision)
BLUE TEAM: ATVN #2 and final EVERGREEN #2

Discussion: Covering breaking news; police lines; caution in reporting fast-changing situations (police chases, use of force).

Exercises:

- In-class critique of EVERGREENS (RED Team)
- Live reporting practice, involving breaking story.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: ATVN #3 and EVERGREEN #2 revisions
- BLUE TEAM: EVERGREEN #3 (**Midterm**), subject to revisions.

Week 9, October 23:

Due: RED TEAM: ATVN #3 and final (revised) EVERGREEN #2
BLUE TEAM: EVERGREEN #3 (**Midterm**) (subject to revision)

Discussion: Writing pitfalls—“cop talk,” clichés, bureaucratese. Hand-out: “A Mixed Bag of Tired Expressions.”

Exercise: In-class critique of Blue Team “Midterm” (evergreen #3).
Possible guest critic.

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: Evergreen #3 (**Midterm**)
- BLUE TEAM: ATVN #3 and Evergreen #3 revisions
- Read “The Interview,” (Chapter 15 from *Broadcast News*)

Week 10, October 30:

Due: RED TEAM: EVERGREEN #3 (**Midterm**) (subject to revision)
BLUE TEAM: ATVN #3 and Revised Evergreen #3

Discussion: Back to the basics
--Brush-up (reality check) on interviewing fundamentals
--Stand-ups Revised: How Are You Doing?

Exercise:
-- Critique of RED TEAM Evergreen #3 (Midterms)
-- Stand-up practice and critique

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: ATVN #4, Revision of Evergreen #3
- BLUE TEAM: Evergreen #4

Week 11, November 6:

Due: RED TEAM: ATVN #4 and revised EVERGREEN #3
BLUE TEAM: EVERGREEN #4 (subject to revision)

Discussion: Developing sources; use of anonymous sources; shield laws

Exercise: Class critique of Blue Team Evergreen #4

Assignments:

- RED TEAM: EVERGREEN #4
- BLUE TEAM: ATVN #4 and EVERGREEN #4 revisions
- BOTH TEAMS: Write two “pitches” for EVERGREEN #5 (**Final**)

Week 12, November 13:

Due: RED TEAM: EVERGREEN #4
BLUE TEAM: ATVN #4, Revised EVERGREEN #4
BOTH TEAMS: Two “pitches” for EVERGREEN #5 (**Final**)

Discussion:
--Critique of Red Team’s Evergreen #4
--Critique of “pitches” for Evergreen #5 (final)

Exercise: Individual vocal instruction and critique with instructor, pinpointing strengths and areas for improvement. (Instructor will set up individual appointments at the previous (Week 11) class session.)

Assignments:
-- RED TEAM: ATVN #5 and revised EVERGREEN #4
-- BLUE TEAM: EVERGREEN #5 (**Final Package**)

November 16: Last day to drop a class with a mark of “W”

Week 13, November 20: (Thanksgiving Week)

Due: RED TEAM: ATVN #5 and revised EVERGREEN #4

Discussion:

Exercise: Live reporting with Q/A (in Annenberg Studio)

Assignments: BOTH TEAMS: EVERGREEN #5 (**Final Package**)
BLUE TEAM: ATVN #5 (Due to the holiday, some members of the Blue Team may be unable to serve their shift during this week.)

Week 14: November 27:

Due: BLUE TEAM: ATVN #5

Discussion: What news directors are looking for in a reporter; how to look for that first job; compiling an audition tape. Possible guest speaker.

Exercise: Final on-camera live reporting session. GRADED.

Assignments: BOTH TEAMS: Complete Evergreen #5 (**Final Package**).
BOTH TEAMS: May turn in an ATVN #6 for extra credit or to complete required number.

Week 15: December 4:

Due: BOTH TEAMS: Evergreen #5 (**Final Package**)
BOTH TEAMS: ATVN for extra credit or to fulfill basic requirements

Discussion:

- Screen, critique Evergreen #5 (Final packages)
- Wrap-up of semester: What we've learned; what still has to be improved.

THERE WILL BE NO FINAL EXAM IN THIS COURSE.